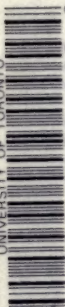


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THE NOVELS OF
BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSSON

Edited by EDMUND GOSSE

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R N E

BY

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Translated from the Norwegian

By WALTER LOW

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

[ARNE was written for the most part at Ejksdal, in Romsdal, during the summer of 1858, and was finished later on in the year at Hop, near Bergen. It was first published at Bergen in the beginning of 1859, but with 1858 on the title-page. The story was not successful at first, and in the ensuing summer the author parted with fifteen years' copy-right of it for a very small sum. No second edition was called for until 1868, when it appeared in Copenhagen, with the spelling modified. In 1872 it was included in the *Fortællinger*, where it has since appeared.

A Swedish translation of Arne was published at Upsala in 1860, and a German one in the same year at Bergen. In 1861 Thomas Krag printed in Bergen an English version which he described as "translated from the second edition" of Arne, apparently taking the German text, which the author had "largely improved," as being the second edition. The translation by Augusta Plesner and S. Rugeley-Powers, which first made the name of Björnson known in this country, was published in 1866 simultaneously in London and New York. Since that time several English versions have been essayed, and Arne has been published in most of the European languages.

E. G.]

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A R N E

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE *

THERE was a deep ravine between two of the mountains : through it a full-flowing stream rushed heavily down over boulder and crag. High was the bank on each hand, and rocky, so that one side stood barren and naked ; but close to the stream and so near it, that in spring and autumn it shook its spray upon them, were green patches of forest-growth, looking up and around, and finding room to throw out their arms neither here nor there.

“What if we were to clothe the ravine-side ? ” said the Juniper one day to the stranger

* *Translator's Note.*—The headings of the chapters are not in the original.

Oak, that stood nearer to her than all the others. The Oak looked down to see who it was that spoke; then looked up again—and held his peace. The stream worked so mightily that its waters were foamy white; the North wind dashed into the ravine, and roared amid the rocky rifts; the bare mountain hung sadly over it, shivering in the cold.

“What if we were to clothe the ravine-side?” said the Juniper to the Fir, on the other side of her. “If any one’s to do it, it may well be we,” said the Fir; he grasped his shaggy beard, and looked across at the Birch.

“What do you think?” he said.

The Birch looked warily up at the rocky wall: so heavy it lay above her, that she scarce felt able to draw breath.

“In God’s name let us clothe it,” said the Birch; and there was none other to help than these three, so they took it upon themselves to clothe the ravine-side.

The Juniper led the way.

When they had gone a little bit of the distance, they met the Heather. The Juniper was about to go by. “No, let’s take the Heather

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too," said the Fir. So the Heather went with them.

Before long the Juniper began to slip. "Catch hold of me," said the Heather. Juniper did so, and where there was only a tiny crevice the Heather put in one finger, and where the Heather once put a finger in, there the Juniper worked in her whole hand. On they clambered upward, the Fir slowly following them, and the Birch labouring after. "But it's God's own work," said the Birch.

Now the Mountain began to ponder what sort of live creatures it could be that were clawing and creeping up her. When she had thought over it for a couple of hundred years or so, she sent down a little streamlet to have a look. It was in the spring-flood days, and the brook slipped on and on till it came to the Heather.

"Heather, dear Heather, can't you let me by?—I am so little!" said the Streamlet.

The Heather was very busy; she just raised her head and went on with her work again. Under her darted the Streamlet, and out and on again.

"Juniper, dear Juniper, can't you let me by?
—I am so little!"

The Juniper gave her a scrutinising glance; but as the Heather had let her by, she thought she couldn't be doing much harm if she did the same. On darted the Streamlet, on and down again, till she came to where the Fir stood, gasping for breath, on the steep hill-side.

"Fir-tree, dear Fir-tree, can't you let me by?
—I'm so little!" said the Streamlet; and she kissed his foot, and behaved so humbly, yet daintily, that he felt quite abashed, and made way.

But the Birch drew aside of her own accord, before ever the Streamlet asked.

"Hi, hi, hi!" laughed the Streamlet, growing bigger and bigger.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Streamlet, still growing. "Ho, ho, ho!" as she grew greater still, and hurled Heather and Juniper, and Fir and Birch flat on their faces and their backs, up and down the craggy boulders. The Mountain sat pondering for some hundred years whether she had not smiled that day.

It was clear enough; the Mountain did not

PROLOGUE

wish to be clothed. The Heather was so much put out that she turned quite green again before going on. "Pluck up your heart!" said the Heather. Juniper had got half up to look at the Heather, and went on getting up for so long that at last she was quite upright. She ran her hand through her hair, set out again on her way, and bit so fast hold of the crags that she thought the Mountain could not help being aware of it. "If you won't hold me, I'll hold you, at any rate!" was what she meant. The Fir bent his toes a bit, to see if they were still sound; raised himself on one foot, and found it all right; raised himself on the other, which was unhurt, too; and then stood up on both. He looked round him to see—firstly, where he had been; secondly, where he had fallen; and thirdly, whither he was to go. Then he began to jog along again, and behaved as if he had never tumbled down in his life. The Birch had made herself very dirty in her fall, but she got up and brushed off the earth. And now on they went again, growing more and more, right up over the side, in sunshine and in rain.

"What's all this about now?" said the

Mountain, when the summer sun rose above them, the dew-drops glittered on them, the birds sang, the wood-mouse piped, the hare frisked hither and thither, and the ermine hid himself with a shrill cry.

Then came the day when the Heather got one eye over the edge of the mountain-wall. "Oh! how lovely, how lovely, how lovely!" she cried, and on she dashed.

"Dear me!" said Juniper, "what can it be that Heather sees?" and she pushed on till she too could peep over. "Oh! how beautiful!" burst from her, and she, too, sped on. "What's up with Juniper to-day, I wonder?" said the Fir, making long, quick strides beneath the summer sun. Presently he stretched up on his toes and peeped over. "Oh, how glorious!" he cried, all his leaves and prickles standing on end with amazement; he struggled up over the ledge, got a firm footing, and was off after the other two.

"What can it be they all see there that I can't?" quoth the Birch, lifting her skirts well up, and tripping after them. She got her whole head above the ledge all at once.

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"Oh, look, look !—if there's not a great wood of Firs and Heather and Juniper and Birches upon the common there waiting for us !" cried the Birch, shaking her leaves in the sunlight till the dew-drops trickled sparkling off.

"Yes," said Juniper, "that's what comes of going on !"

CHAPTER II

KAMPEN

ARNE was born up at Kampen. His mother was Margit, the only child at the little farm among the crags. When she was eighteen, she stopped too long at a dance one evening ; her friends had gone off without her, so Margit thought the way home would be just as long for her, whether she waited till the end of the dance or not. Thus it came about that Margit remained sitting there till Nils Skrædder,* the fiddler, suddenly laid aside his instrument, as was his wont when he had had more than enough to drink, left the dancers to hum their own tune, took hold of the prettiest girl he could find, and letting his feet keep as good time to the dance as music to a song, jerked off with the heel of his boot the

* *i.e.*, tailor.

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hat of the tallest man in the room. "Ho!" laughed he.

As Margit walked home that night, the moon was making wondrous sport over the snow. When she got to the loft where she slept, she could not help looking out at it again. Taking off her bodice, she stood with it in her hand; then she felt that she was getting cold, so she quickly took off her things and dived far down beneath the coverlet. That night Margit dreamed of a great red cow that had got into their field. She strove to drive it out, but, try as she might, she could not stir from the spot. The cow stood there quietly eating, getting fatter and fuller, and every now and again looking up at her with great heavy eyes.

Next time there was a dance in the parish Margit was there. She did not care much to dance that evening; she sat listening to the music, and it seemed strange to her that others did not want to do so too. But when it grew late, the fiddler rose and wanted to have a dance. He went straight across to Margit Kampen. She was scarcely aware of anything, but she was dancing with Nils Skrædder!

Before long the weather grew warmer, and there was no more dancing. That spring, Margit was so taken up with a little lamb of theirs which had fallen ill, that her mother thought she was going almost too far.

"It's only a lamb, after all," she said.

"Yes," replied Margit, "but it's in pain."

It was long since she had been to church; she had rather her mother went, she said, and one of them must stop at home. One Sunday, however, when the summer was getting on, the weather was so fine that the mother thought the hay might well be left out for another day and night, and so they could both go. Margit had nothing much to say against it, so she put on her things; but when they got within hearing of the church bells she burst into tears. The mother turned pale as death. They went on, the mother in advance, Margit following; they listened to the sermon, joined in the hymns, heard the prayers out, and waited for the bells to peal out the end of worship before they got up to go. But when they were in the room at home again, her mother threw both her arms round her. "Hide nothing from me, my child!" she cried.

KAMPEN

Winter came again, but Margit danced no more. Nils Skrædder went on playing, drank more than formerly, and wound up each party by dancing with the prettiest girl there. It was now said for certain that he could get whichever he wished of the daughters of the richest farmers in the place ; some added that Eli Böen herself had offered him the hand of her daughter Birgit, who was sick for love of him.

But just about this time it was, that a child of the cotter's daughter at Kampen was brought to be christened. It was given the name of Arne, and its father was said to be Nils Skrædder.

On the evening of that very day Nils was at a great wedding feast : there he drank all he could. He would not play, but was dancing the whole time, and could scarcely endure any one else being on the floor. But when he came to Birgit Böen and asked for a dance, she refused. He gave a short laugh, turned on his heel, and took hold of the first best girl at hand. She, too, held back. He looked down at her—a little dark creature, who had sat looking intently at him ; she was now quite pale. He bent lightly over her and whispered :

"Won't you dance with *me*, Karen?"

She did not answer; he repeated his question. Then she replied, whispering as he had done:

"The dance might go further than I should like."

He drew slowly back till he got to the middle of the floor, then he gave a sudden spring, and danced the "Halling" alone. No one else danced: all stood silently looking on.

Then he went out into the barn, threw himself down, and wept.

Margit sat at home with the little boy. She heard about Nils, and how he went from dance to dance; she looked at the child and wept, looked at him again and was glad at heart. The first thing she taught the boy to say was "Daddy," but she dared not do so when the mother—or rather grandmother, as she was henceforth called—was anywhere near. The consequence of this was that it was the grandmother whom the boy called "Daddy." It cost Margit much trouble to teach him not to do so, and this helped to make him sharp and quick at a very early age. He was not very big before he learnt that Nils Skrædder was his father, and

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as he was then at an age when all that is out of the common is attractive, he soon got to know what sort of man Nils Skrædder was. The grandmother had strictly forbidden Nils ever being mentioned ; her great aim in life was to get her little Kampen made into a regular farm, so that her daughter and her daughter's son might be secure. She took advantage of the neighbouring farmer's poverty to buy ground, and every year she paid off a portion of the money, working like a man, for she had been a widow now for fourteen years. Kampen grew steadily bigger, and now supported four cows and sixteen sheep, besides having a half share in a horse.

Nils Skrædder, meanwhile, was still going about the parish. His business was not so profitable now as it used to be, partly because he took less trouble about it, and partly because he was not so well liked as of old. He devoted himself all the more to playing the fiddle, and this was often the occasion of his giving himself up to drink, which led him into quarrels and stormy days. There were some who heard him complain of his lot.

ARNE

Arne might have been about six years old when he was one winter's day playing at sailors on his bed : he had put up the white counterpane for a sail, and sat steering with a ladle. His grandmother was sitting spinning, busy with her own thoughts. Every now and then she would nod her head, as if to hold fast the thing she was thinking of. Then the boy knew that she was taking no notice of him, so he began to sing, just as he had heard it, a song about Nils Skrædder, coarse and low as it was :

- " If you've chanced but a day's length among us to dwell,
You have surely of Nils, our brave tailor, heard tell.
- " If it's more than a day you've been here in our town,
Then of course you know how he knocked Bully-Knut
down ;
- " And that off his own barn-roof he pitched Ola Per,
With a ' Next time, take food when you fly thro' the air.'
- " When Hans Bugge was getting so mighty a fame,
That the land and the water resounded his name,
- " In his pride he bragged ' Tailor ! now say, if you dare,
Where you'll lie, and I'll spit, and I'll put your head there.'
- " ' Just come here,' answered Nils, ' within reach of my arm !
Don't you know that mere swagger can't do any harm ?'
- " So they met : the first grapple proved neither the best,
And the hot-headed fellows prepared for the rest.

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"At the second round, Bugge lost foothold and fell.
Have a care to the game, Hans! you'll need to play well!

"But the third time Nils flings him head-down on the stones
In his blood, as he jeers 'Spit away, lad!'—Hans groans."

The boy sang no farther; but there were two verses more, which his mother had *not* taught him:

"A tree's shadow hast seen o'er pure shining snow pass?
Our Nils hast thou seen, when he plays with a lass?

"Our fine Nils hast thou seen as he lords it in dance?
Art thou Maid? Then away, e'er befall thee mischance."

These two verses the grandmother knew, and they came the more vividly back to her now, just because they were left missing. She said nothing to the boy, but to the mother she said:

"That's right: let the boy know all your shame; but don't forget the last two verses!"

Nils had now so given himself up to drink that he was no longer the man he used to be. There were many folks who thought it would soon be all over with him.

Now it happened that there were two Americans visiting the place, and they heard that there was a bridal near at hand; at once they felt a

desire to see it, and observe the customs of the people. Nils was playing there. They gave a thaler each to the fiddler and asked for the "Halling." No one would take upon himself to dance it, in spite of all entreaties. One after another begged Nils himself to dance it ; he was the best of them, after all, they said.

The more he refused, the more they pressed him, till at last they were all urging him to dance, and that was just what he wanted. He handed his fiddle to another man, laid aside coat and cap, and stepped, smiling, into the midst of the group. All the old anxious attention was on him now, and that gave him back his former vigour again. The onlookers pressed round him as closely as possible, those in the background mounting on tables and chairs, some girls looked over the heads of the others. Most conspicuous among these was a tall lass with light, tawny-brown hair, blue eyes set deep beneath a broad brow, and a mouth with long curving lips that was often smiling, and was then generally a little awry—it was Birgit Böen. Nils saw her as he cast his eyes up towards the rafters. The music struck up : utter silence fell upon all. Nils threw

KAMPEN

himself into the dance. He bounded over the floor, glided up the room in time to the music, with his body bending towards the ground, swayed now to one side, now to another, crossed his legs suddenly beneath him, sprang up again, made as if to throw himself over, and then glided along again all aslope. The fiddle was wielded by a doughty hand, and the music grew more and more fierce. Nils threw his head further and further back, and suddenly struck the beam above him with his heel, so that the dust came showering down on those below. There were shrieks of wonder and laughter around him, and the girls stood looking at him as if unable to draw breath. The music burst in upon them, and spurred him on anew with more and more energy. Nils by no means held back; he threw out his limbs, hopped in time to the music, gathered himself up as if for another leap, then, instead of taking it, glided forward again aslant as before, till, just as he saw no one was expecting it, he dashed his heel against the rafter overhead, and again and again turned a somersault, now forward, then backwards—and stood erect and motionless on his feet. That was enough.

The fiddle gave out a trill and a flourish, and then a few wavering deep tones ; finally, these died away in a single long bass note. The lookers-on dispersed about the room : the breathless stillness gave way to quick, loud talk, mingled with shouts and laughter. Nils was standing by the wall ; the Americans came over to him with their interpreter, and gave him five thalers apiece. Then there was silence once more.

The Americans spoke for a moment or two with their interpreter. Then the latter asked him if he would go with them as their servant ; he should have whatever wages he asked for.

"Where am I to go ?" asked Nils, while all the people pressed up to him as close as they could.

"Out into the world," was the answer.

"When ?" asked Nils, looking round him with shining eyes, which encountered those of Birgit Böen, and held them fast.

"In a week, when they come back," he was answered.

"Maybe I shall be ready then," said Nils, weighing his two five-thaler pieces. He had leant one arm on the shoulder of the man standing

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next to him, and now was trembling so that the latter tried to make him sit down on a bench.

"Oh, that's nothing !" answered Nils ; and he made a few staggering steps over the floor, and then a firm one or two ; then he turned and called for a jig.

All the girls had pressed forward. He looked round at them slowly and deliberately, and then went over to one in a dark frock—it was Birgit Böen. He stretched forth his hand, and she gave both hers. He gave a laugh, drew back, put his arm round a girl standing beside her, and danced off with hilarious glee. The blood rushed to Birgit's neck and face. A tall, quiet-looking man stood just behind her ; he took her hand and danced away close after Nils. The latter saw it ; and perhaps from mere carelessness danced so hard up against them that the man and Birgit fell to the ground with a heavy fall. Birgit got up, crept aside, and burst out bitterly weeping.

The quiet-looking man got up more slowly and went straight up to Nils, who was still going on dancing.

"You must stop a bit," said the man.

Nils paid no heed, so the other took him by

the arm. Nils tore himself loose and looked him in the face.

"I don't know you," he said, with a smile.

"No, but you've got to know me now," said the quiet-looking man, and struck him straight over the eyes.

Nils, who was not expecting anything of the kind, fell with a dull, heavy thud right against the sharp corner of the stone grate. He tried to rise again, but could not—his back was broken.

At Kampen, things had undergone a change. The grandmother had been ailing of late, but as soon as she perceived it, she began to work even harder than before to get together the money for paying off the final instalment of the debt due on the farm.

"Then," she said, "you and the boy will have all you need ; but if ever you let any one in to waste it for you, I shall turn round in my grave."

When autumn drew on she had had the satisfaction of being able to jog up to the former owner of the land with the last portion of the debt ; and a happy woman was she when she

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sat in her chair at home again, and said : " Well, that's done now ! " But that very day she was stricken with mortal sickness. She had to take to her bed, and she never left it again. Her daughter buried her in the churchyard, where there was room for the sleepers, and set up a fine headstone, on which were graved her name, her age, and a verse of one of Kingo's hymns.

A fortnight after the funeral, the grandmother's black Sunday gown was made into clothes for the boy, and as he stood in them, he looked as grave as if she were come back to life again. Of his own accord, he went to the clasped book with big print that his grandmother had read and sung out of every Sunday ; he opened it, and found her spectacles lying there. These the boy had never been allowed to touch all his life ; now he took them timidly up, put them on his nose, and looked through them at the book. All was misty. " That's a very funny thing," thought the boy ; " that was how grandmother used to read God's word." He held them up to the light, to see what was the matter with them—and there lay the spectacles on the floor !

He was very frightened, and, as the door at

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that moment began to open, it seemed to him as if grandmother must be just about to come in ; but it was his mother and six men, who, with much noise and tramping of feet, carried in a litter between them, and set it down in the middle of the floor. The door stood open behind them for a time, so that the cold air came into the room.

On the litter lay a man with black hair and a pale face. The mother walked about, weeping.

"Lay him carefully down on the bed," she besought them, and helped them to do so. But all the while the men were moving about with him, there was a noise of something being crushed under their feet.

"Ah, that's only grandmother's spectacles," thought the boy ; but he did not say it.

CHAPTER III

THE WEDDING

THIS was in the autumn, as we have said. A week after the day that Nils Skrædder was taken to Margit Kampen's, came a message from the Americans that he was to hold himself in readiness. He happened just then to be lying writhing in dreadful pain; he bit his teeth together and cried out:

"Let them go to the devil!"

Margit stood still by his bed, as if she had had no answer. He noticed it, and a moment after, in a weary voice, he repeated:

"Let them—go!"

When winter drew on, he had got so far better that he could sit up, though his health was ruined for all his days. The first time he really got up, he drew forth his violin and tuned it; but it worked him up to such a pitch of

excitement that he had to go back to bed again. He was very silent now, though easy to get on with, and as time went by he began to read with the boy, and to do work in the house; but he never went out, nor did he talk with people who came to see him. At first, Margit used to tell him news about things in the parish; but after it he would fall into a fit of gloomy depression, so she gave it up.

As spring came on, he and Margit began to sit up later than before, and talk together after their supper. The boy was at those times sent off to bed. Soon after the beginning of spring, their banns were given out in church, and they were then quietly married.

He took part in the work in the fields, and looked after everything sensibly and without fuss. To the boy, Margit said: "There is both help and comfort in him for us. Now you must be good and obedient, and do all that you can for him."

Margit had been a buxom lass through all her trouble; her face was ruddy and her eyes very large, and they looked the larger for the ring that had come round them. Her lips were

THE WEDDING

full, and her face round, fresh, and healthy-looking, though she was not very strong. Now she looked nicer than ever before, and she was constantly singing, as was her wont, when she was at work.

Now it happened one Sunday afternoon that father and son had gone out, to see how things were getting on in the fields. Arne was frisking merrily along by his father, aiming hither and thither with a bow and arrows, which Nils himself had made for the boy. Thus going along, they got on to the road that led from the church and the parsonage into what was known as "The Plain." Nils sat down on a stone by the wayside and was soon lost in thought; the boy darted about in the road, and ran after his arrows, moving in the direction of the church.

"Take care!" cried the father, "don't go too far away!" Suddenly the boy stopped short in his agile movements, as if he were listening.

"Father!" he shouted, "I hear music!"

The man listened too; there was the sound of fiddles and of loud and merry shouts accompanied by the clatter of horses' hoofs and the

ARNE

rumbling of carriage wheels; it was a bridal party coming back from the church.

"Come here, boy!" shouted the father, and Arne knew from his voice that he must come at once.

Nils had suddenly risen, and drawn back behind a great tree. The boy followed.

"Not here — there!" And the boy fled behind a clump of alders. The train of carriages was already turning the corner by the birch copse, and they came galloping along: the horses were white with foam, and men and women merry with drink were shouting and singing. Father and son counted carriage after carriage; there were in all fourteen. In the first sat two fiddlers, and the bride-march rang out through the clear, dry air; a boy stood up behind them, driving. Next came the bride, with a wreath on her head, sitting tall and bright in the rays of the sun; she was smiling, with her lips curved slightly to one side; by her side was a man in blue clothes, with a gentle, cheerful face. A long procession followed; men sitting on women's laps, little lads perched up behind them, drunken folks driving, half a

THE WEDDING

dozen pulled along by one horse; in the last vehicle came the caterer, holding a keg of brandy on his knees. They sped on, shouting and singing, and dashed headlong down the hill. The noise of the fiddlers, the shouts of merriment, and the rattling of wheels was borne back through the cloud of dust that followed them, then melted into one single sound, which gave place to a dull murmur, and finally died away. Nils was still standing motionless, when he heard a rustle behind him; he turned round; it was the boy creeping forth again.

"Who was that, father?" But Arne started as he saw the gloom on his father's face; he stood still, waiting for an answer, and then remained standing still because he got none. At last his patience gave out, and he ventured again. "Shall we go?" he murmured.

Nils seemed still to be looking after the bridal train, but now he pulled himself together, and began to move. Arne followed him. He put an arrow to his bow, shot it away, and ran off after it.

"Don't trample the grass down!" said Nils sternly. The boy let the arrow lie where it

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was, and came back again. Presently, though, he forgot, and whilst his father stood still again, he threw himself down on the meadow, and began turning somersaults.

"Don't trample the grass down, I tell you!" cried Nils, and pulled the boy up by the arm as if he meant to dislocate it. After that, the boy followed his father in silence.

Margit stood in the doorway waiting for them; she had just come back from the cow-house, where she must have been hard at work, for her hair was all untidy, her linen was soiled and stained, and her clothes were in the same state; but she smiled as she stood there in the doorway.

"Some of the cows got loose," she said, "and did some mischief, but they're made fast again now."

"Can't you manage to look a bit decent of Sundays?" said Nils, going past her into the sitting-room.

"Yes. Now that work's over, it's time to get tidy," said Margit, as she followed him. She immediately began to change her clothes, singing as she did so. Now Margit sang well, but at times she was a trifle hoarse.

THE WEDDING

"Stop that row!" shouted Nils, from the bed, on which he had thrown himself, and Margit was silent at once.

Just then in rushed the boy.

"There's a great black dog," he cried, "that's come running into the yard—a great ugly thing——"

"Shut up, boy!" yelled Nils, getting half off the bed to stamp with one foot on the ground. "Curse it, the devil must be in the brat!" he mumbled, as he drew up his foot again. The mother gave the boy a threatening glance. "Can't you see father's not in good spirits?" she said.

"Won't you have some strong coffee with syrup in it?" she went on to Nils, trying to coax him into good humour again. This was a beverage that the grandmother had liked, and the others too. Nils had no liking for it, but he used to drink it all the same, because the others did so. "Won't you have some strong coffee and syrup?" she repeated, for he had not answered the first time. Nils raised himself on his elbows: "Do you think," he screamed, "I'll swallow that muck?"

ARNE

Margit was dumb with astonishment : she put her hand on the boy, and went out with him.

They had various things to do out of doors, and so they did not come back till supper-time. Nils was not within. Arne was sent out to the fields to call him in, but he could not find him anywhere. They waited till the food was nearly cold ; but when they had finished supper Nils was not yet back. Margit began to grow anxious ; she sent the boy to bed, and sat down to wait. A little after midnight, in came Nils.

"Where have you been, dear ?" asked she.

"That's no business of yours," he answered, and sat slowly down on the bench. He was drunk.

From that day, Nils was constantly going about the neighbourhood, and each time he came back again tipsy.

"I can't stand it here with you," he cried once when he came in. She began to defend herself with gentle words, but he stamped upon the floor, and bade her be silent. If he was drunk, that was her fault, he said. If he was wicked, that was her fault too. If he was a cripple and a miserable creature for all the days

THE WEDDING

of his life, that was all the fault of her, and that confounded brat of hers.

"Why," he cried, bursting into tears, "were you always coming after me, and hanging about me? What harm did I do you, that you could not leave me in peace?"

"But Heaven bless me and preserve me!" said Margit, "was it I that came after you then?"

"Yes, that it was!" he screamed through his tears; and springing up he went on: "And now at last you've got it all as you wanted it; I go crawling about here from tree to tree; every day I creep around, looking at my own grave. And I might have lived grandly with the richest and finest girl in the place, I might have travelled as far as the sun travels, had not you and your confounded boy thrown yourselves in my way."

"That was no fault of the boy's, at any rate," she said, trying once more to defend herself.

"If you won't hold your noise," he screamed, "I'll strike you!" And he struck her.

Next day, when he had slept off the effects of the liquor, he was ashamed of himself, and much

ARNE

kinder than usual to the boy. But he soon drank again, and then again he struck her ; at length he got to beating her each time he was tipsy. The boy wept and moaned, and then he got beaten too. At times, too, Nils was so wild with remorse that he could not stay within doors. Now, too, he began to yearn to go to dances again ; he played his fiddle as of old, and took the boy with him to carry the case. There Arne saw many things. The mother wept at the lad's constantly going to such places, but dared not say anything to the father.

"Cling fast to God," she earnestly begged him, as she kissed him, "and learn nothing wicked."

But it was very cheerful and amusing, and here at home it was neither cheerful nor amusing. He turned more and more from her and to his father : she marked it, and was silent. Arne picked up all sorts of songs at these dances, and sang them afterwards to his father ; this amused the latter, and sometimes the boy was even able to make him laugh. This so flattered the lad that he took care to learn as many songs as possible ; he soon got to see what sort his

THE WEDDING

father liked best, and what it was in them that he laughed at. If there was nothing of the sort in the song, the boy put it in himself as well as he could, and so he early got used to putting words to music. Nils liked best to hear jeering songs and scoffing ditties about folks who had risen to prosperity and power; so that was the sort of thing that Arne sang.

At length the mother wished to have him with her of an evening to help in the cow-shed; he made all sorts of excuses to get off, but they proved unavailing, and he had to go with her. Then it was that she spoke earnestly to him of God and all that is good, and ended, as she folded him in her arms, by tearfully begging and praying him not to grow up a bad man.

The mother used to read with him, and the boy was most wonderfully quick to learn. His father was very proud of this, and got into the way of telling him—especially when he had been drinking—that he had *his* head.

At the dances Nils soon grew accustomed, when the drink had got the better of him, to order Arne to sing to the company. The boy sang one song after another, amid loud applause

and laughter ; the applause delighted the boy almost more than it did Nils, so that at last there was no end to the songs he learned to sing. Anxious mothers, hearing him, went to his own mother and told her, for the songs he sang were not fit for a boy. The mother took the boy aside, and bade him, in the name of God and all that is good, not to sing such songs ; and now it seemed to the boy that his mother was against everything he delighted in. He told his father for the first time what his mother had said. She had to suffer for it in consequence next time Nils got drunk, but after that Arne never told him anything again. What he had done came now vividly before the lad, and in his soul he besought God and her for forgiveness, for he could not bring himself to do so openly. The mother was as kind to him as ever, and this cut him to the heart.

Once, however, he forgot himself. He had the power of mimicking anybody, especially as regards their way of speaking and singing. One evening, when he was amusing his father by this, his mother came in, and when she had gone out again, it came into Nils's head to make the boy imitate his mother's singing. At first he refused,

THE WEDDING

but the father, who lay on the bed, laughing so that his sides shook, persisted obstinately in his demand.

"Well," thought the boy, "she's a good way off, so she won't hear it"; and he sang just as she did at times when she was hoarse and inclined to tears. The father laughed so that it almost frightened the lad, and he left off of his own accord. Then Margit came in from the kitchen, looked mournfully and steadfastly at Arne, walked over to the dresser for a bowl, and went out again.

Arne felt hot as fire throughout his whole body. She had heard it all, then! He jumped down from the table on which he had been sitting, dashed out, and threw himself down on the ground as if he would fain bury himself in it. He could not rest; he sprang up, feeling he must get further away. He rushed by the barn, and there behind it sat his mother, hemming a new and fine shirt for him. At other times she used to sing a hymn over her work when she sat thus; now she was not singing—not that she was weeping, either—she was just sitting still, sewing. But Arne could contain himself no longer;

ARNE

he threw himself down on the grass at her feet, looked up at her, and sobbed passionately. The mother let her sewing fall, and took his head in her hands.

"Poor Arne!" she said, and put her face against his.

He did not make an attempt to speak, but wept as he never had before.

"I knew all the time," said the mother, stroking his hair, "that you were good at heart."

"Mother, you won't say No to what I'm going to ask you?" was the first thing he could say.

"That you know I never do," was the answer.

He tried to check his tears, and then, with his head in her lap, he blurted out:

"Mother, sing me something!"

"My dear, I can't, you know," she said, in a low voice.

"Mother, sing me something!" implored he, "else I'll never believe that I'm fit to look at you again!"

She stroked his hair, but made no sound.

"Mother, sing, sing! do you hear, sing!" he sobbed out, "else I'll go far away and never come back home again."

THE WEDDING

And as he lay there, big boy of over fourteen as he was, with his head in his mother's lap, she began to sing over him :

" Lord, protect this little child,
Playing on the rugged shore.
Round him let Thy Spirit mild
Cast its bonds for evermore.
Mighty waves nor treach'rous sand
Tear him from that sacred band.
Safe and blessèd may he live.
Praise to Thee and glory give.

" Mother sits in anxious pain,
Knowing not why thus he tarries ;
Calls him o'er and o'er again,
No reply the stillness carries.
Yet she knows, where'er the spot,
Help divine forsakes him not.
Far from angry wave and foam,
Jesus leads him gently home."

She sang several verses : Arne lay still, for a holy peace had fallen upon him, and under its sway he felt refreshed, and wearily restful. The last word that he heard distinctly was " Jesus." It seemed to carry him into a great burst of light where twelve or thirteen voices sang clear ; and above them all he could hear his mother's. Sweeter music he had never known ; he prayed that it might be given him

ARNE

so to sing. It seemed to him that if he were to sing very softly, he too should learn how to do it; so now he began to sing softly, and then more and more softly, until the music seemed well-nigh heavenly, and in his joy at this he pealed forth in loud tones—and all was at an end. He was awake again: he looked up and listened intently, but nothing struck on his ear, save the mighty, unceasing noise of the waterfall, and the sound of the little streamlet which, with soft and constant murmur, flowed close by the barn. The mother had gone; but first she had laid beneath his head her jacket and the half-finished shirt.

CHAPTER IV

DAYBREAK

Now that the time had come for the cattle to be looked after in the woods, Arne wanted to tend them. Nils was against it ; as yet Arne had never taken part in such work, and he was now in his fifteenth year. But he pleaded his cause so well, that it was decided in the way he wished, and all that spring, summer, and autumn he was only at home to sleep ; he was in the woods by himself the livelong day.

He took his books with him to the woods : he spent his time in reading and cutting letters on the bark of trees, in walking and thinking, in dreamy yearnings and singing ; but in the evening, when he got home, the father would often be drunk and strike the mother, cursing her and the place as he boasted about once having had the chance of travelling far away from it all.

ARNE

Then the boy was seized with a longing for travel. At home all was amiss, and his books increased his longing to depart—nay, sometimes the very air seemed to be calling him away over the mighty mountains.

Thus things were, when at midsummer time he fell in with Kristen, the Captain's eldest son, who had come to the woods with one of the farm lads for the horses, so as to ride back home. He was a boy a few years older than Arne, light-hearted and full of fun, ever restless in all his thoughts, but, notwithstanding, firm and steadfast of purpose. He spoke quickly and jerkily, and, for choice, of two things at a time ; he rode horses bare-backed ; shot birds on the wing, and knew all about fly-fishing ; in short, he seemed to Arne a very model in all things. He, too, was yearning to travel, and talked to Arne of far-off lands till they seemed to lie shining before him. He found out Arne's love of reading, and brought up to him books that he himself had read, and when these were finished he got new ones. On Sundays he would come with geography and maps, and explain them to him, and Arne read so eagerly all that

DAYBREAK

summer and autumn that he grew quite pale and thin.

In the winter he got them to let him read at home, partly because he was to be confirmed next year, and partly because he had a way of managing his father. He began, too, to go to school now ; but there he was most content when he could shut his eyes and call up to his mind his books at home. He had no longer any friends among the peasant lads.

The father's ill-treatment of the mother increased with years, as did also his physical ailments and his drunkenness. But when, spite of this, Arne had to sit at home and amuse him to get his mother an hour's peace, and to do so had often to talk in a way which now in his heart he despised, he began to loathe his father ; but this feeling he kept closely to himself, as he did his love for his mother. When he met Kristen, their talk was ever of travel and books ; he said nothing, even to him, of how things were at home. But many a time when, after converse of wide wanderings with him, he walked home alone, and thought of what would very likely be going on there, he burst into tears, and prayed

ARNE

to God among His stars to order things that it should be granted him to journey forth before long.

In summer, Kristen and he were confirmed. Straightway the former began to carry out his plans. His father had no choice but to let him go away and become a sailor. He gave Arne his books, promised to write to him often, and fared forth.

So now Arne was left alone.

It was then that the longing to write songs came again upon him. But now he no longer patched up old ones; he composed new songs, putting into them all that most oppressed his spirit.

But his heart was too heavy, and his grief could not be pressed into verse. Through the long nights he lay sleepless, till at last it seemed quite certain to him that he could no longer endure his life there. He must go away and find Kristen, he felt, without saying a word to any one. But when he thought of his mother, and of what would become of her, he scarcely dared to look her in the face.

One night at this time, he was sitting up very

DAYBREAK

late reading. Whenever he felt more depressed than usual, it was his books he fled to, never noticing that they only made him suffer the more. The father was away at a wedding-feast, but was expected home that evening; the mother was tired and dreaded his return, so had gone to bed. Arne heard a dull fall in the passage, and started up; there was the noise of some heavy thing striking against the door. It was the father returning.

Arne opened the door, and looked down at him.

"Is that you, my bright boy?" hiccupped Nils; "then come and help your daddy up."

Arne lifted him up and supported him to a bench, picked up the fiddle-case, brought it in too, and shut the door.

"Aye, look at me, my bright boy," Nils rambled on. "I'm not much to look at now. I'm no longer the Nils I once was. Let this warn you—I warn you—you—nev—never to touch brandy; that's the very Devil—the World, the Flesh, the Devil. 'He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble and meek.' Alas! alas! what have I come to!"

ARNE

He sat still for a moment, and then sang through his drunken tears:

“ ‘ Jesus Christ, Redeemer mine,
Help I need, so grant me Thine ;
Deep in mire although I lie,
Still Thine erring child am I.’ ”

‘ Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but say but the word——’ ”

He threw himself forward, hid his face in his hands, and sobbed convulsively. Long he lay thus, and then he began to repeat word for word from the Bible, as he had learnt it more than twenty years before :

“ But she came and begged Him, and said : Lord, help me ! But he answered and said : It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs. But she said : Yea, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master’s table.”

He relapsed into silence again, but wept more freely and less violently.

The mother had long been awake, but had not dared to look up ; but now when she heard him weeping as one who had been saved, she raised herself on her elbows and looked up.

DAYBREAK

But no sooner did Nils catch sight of her than he screamed :

"Do you look up—you? you want to see what you've brought me to, don't you? Yes, this is what I look like, just this—here before you!" He began to rise, and she crouched beneath the fur coverlet. "No, no, don't hide yourself! I'll find you soon enough," he said, and stretching out his right hand, he began to fumble about with his forefinger. "Tickle! Tickle!" he cried, and he drew aside the coverlet and put his forefinger on her throat.

"Father!" cried Arne.

"Look how shrivelled up and lean you've got," Nils went on; "there's not far to go in this. Tickle! tickle!" The mother convulsively seized his hand with both hers, but she could not free herself from his grasp: she crouched in a heap beneath the coverlet.

"Father!" cried Arne again.

"So! there's some life in you yet, is there?" Nils went on, unheeding. "What a sight she is when she wriggles, too! Tickle! tickle!"

"Father!" cried Arne once more, and the room began to go up and down.

ARNE

"Tickle, I say!" screamed Nils.

She let go his hands and gave herself up to her fate.

"Father!" shrieked Arne, and rushed to a corner of the room where stood an axe.

"It's only obstinacy that keeps you from crying out," Nils went on. "You'd better take care, though; such a funny thought's got hold of me now! Tickle, tickle!"

"Father!" cried Arne, and grasped the axe, but stood still as if nailed to the floor; for at that moment the father rose up, gave a piercing shriek, pressed his hand to his heart, and fell to the earth. "Jesus Christ," came to his lips, and then he lay quite still.

Arne scarcely knew where he stood or what was before him; he almost expected the room to burst apart, and a flash from the heavens to fall upon it. The mother began to draw long, deep breaths, as if she had freed herself of an incubus; at last she raised herself in the bed, and saw the father lying outstretched on the floor, with the son standing by him, axe in hand.

"Merciful Heaven! what have you done?"

DAYBREAK

she shrieked, as, springing out of bed, and throwing a garment round her, she drew near to him. Then something seemed to set free Arne's tongue.

"He fell down by himself," he said, in a low tone.

"Oh Arne, Arne, I don't believe you!" cried the mother in an earnest, reproachful voice. "Now may Christ help you!" And she cast herself upon the body, with a burst of wailing.

But now the boy began to emerge from his bewilderment, and he too fell on his knees.

"Sure as I hope for mercy from God," he said, "he fell of himself, just as he stood there."

"Then our Lord Himself has been here!" said the woman quietly, and, raising herself on her knees, she gazed fixedly before her.

Nils lay just as he fell, with stiffened limbs, and open eyes and mouth. His hands were near together, as if he had tried to fold them, but had not had time.

"Come," said the mother, "you are strong; help me to lift your father up, so that he may lie on the bed."

They raised him up and laid him on it: she

ARNE

closed his eyes and mouth, straightened out his limbs, and folded his hands.

They both stood there looking at him. All that they had lived through before seemed not to have lasted so long, nor to have had so much in it, as had the last hour. If the Devil himself had been there, so also had God ; the encounter had been brief. All that had been was now over and done.

It was now a little past midnight, and they had to watch by the dead till daybreak. Arne went to the hearth and made a great fire ; the mother sat down beside it. And as she sat there, she thought of the many evil days she had gone through with Nils, so that she thanked God in fever-fervent prayer for what he had done. "But all the same I had some happy days with him, too," she said, and wept as if in remorse for the thanksgiving that had just escaped her ; and before long she was taking all the blame upon herself, in that, for love of the dead, she had transgressed God's law, and broken her mother's commands ; and therefore (she thought) it was right for her own sinful love to have been her punishment.

DAYBREAK

Arne sat down opposite to her. The mother glanced at the bed and said :

"Arne, you must remember that it's for your sake I have borne it all," and she burst into tears, longing for a loving word to support her amid the flow of her own self-reproaches, and comfort her in all time to come. The boy trembled, but had no answer.

"You must never leave me!" she sobbed out. Then there came before his eyes all that she had been in the sorrowful past, and how unutterably lonely she would feel if, in return for all her loving kindness to him, he were to forsake her now.

"Never, never!" he said, in a low, fervent voice ; he wanted to go over to where she sat, but felt as if he could not move. There sat both of them, weeping bitterly. She prayed aloud, now for the dead, and again for herself and her boy : then came the tears again, to be interrupted presently by supplications to Heaven, which again gave place to lamentation. At last she said :

"Arne, you have a good voice ; sit back a little way and sing a hymn for your father."

ARNE

Straightway he seemed to find strength to do it. He got up, fetched a hymn-book, and kindled a fir-splinter ; then, with the torch in one hand and the book in the other, he stood by the head of the bed, and sang in a clear voice Kingo's 127th hymn :

“ Turn from us in grace Thine anger sore,
Call us not Thy judgment seat before.
Grant to us Thy servants, sinful-living,
Thy forgiving ! ”

CHAPTER V

UPLAND KNUT

ARNE grew up reserved and shy; he went on tending the cattle and making songs. Though he was in his twentieth year, he still went with the herds to summer pasture. He got the pastor to lend him books to read, and that was the only thing he cared for.

The pastor urged him to become a school-teacher, saying that his faculties and learning ought to be turned to the advantage of the community. Arne did not answer at once, but on the following day, as he was driving his sheep to pasture, he made this song:

" Little skipping lamb of mine,
Follow close the herd bell's chime;
Though the road be steep and high,
Listen to my guiding cry.

ARNE

"Little skipping lamb of mine
Keep for me that fleece of thine;
For my mother 'twill provide
Garments warm in winter-tide.

"Little skipping lamb of mine,
Keep your flesh all soft and fine;
You are chosen from the troop,
As the lamb to make our soup."

When in his twentieth year, he one day chanced to overhear a conversation between his mother and the wife of the former owner of the farm. They disagreed about the horse that they owned in common.

"I'll just wait and hear what Arne says," said his mother.

"That sluggard!" answered the other, "he'd just as lief as not have the horse wandering about all day in the woods, as he does himself, I dare say!"

Then the mother was silent, though she had spoken up well enough before.

Arne turned as red as fire. Never had it occurred to him before that his mother might be put to shame on his account. "Though, perhaps," thought he now, "it may often have happened. But why had she never told him, then?"

UPLAND KNUT

He kept thinking about it till it impressed on his mind that his mother scarcely ever spoke to him; but then he never spoke to her either. Indeed, whom did he ever speak to?

Many a Sunday, when he sat silent at home, he would have liked to have read aloud a sermon to his mother—her own eyes were not good enough, for she had done too much weeping in her life; but he could not bring himself to do it. Many a time, too, he would have liked to offer to read aloud from his own books, when all at home was silence, and it seemed to him that she must be finding it rather dull. But he could not bring himself to do it.

“Well, well!” he thought, at last, “I’ll give up going to the woods with the cattle, and spend my time down here with mother.”

Firm in this resolve, he went to the woods, as usual, for a few days, drove the herds far and wide for pasture, and made this song meanwhile:

“The parish is all restless, but there’s peace in grove and wood,
No beadle here impounds you, to suit his crabbèd mood;
No strife profanes *our* little church, tho’ there it rages high,
But then we *have* no little church, and that perhaps is why!

ARNE

"How happy is the woodland grove, despite the eager way
The hawk will chase the sparrow that he chooses for his
prey ;
And tho' on some ill-fated thing the eagle swoops to
ground,
The little beast without it would a speedy grave have found.

"One tree is conquered by the axe, while skyward rises one
The fox has torn the lambkin ere the setting of the sun.
The wolf has killed the little fox, now both are lying dead,
For Arne shot the hungry wolf before the night had fled.

"In valley and in woodland there are many things to see,
But of one thing be you certain, that your sight unclouded
be.
I dreamed I saw a stripling—by his hand his father fell ;
It seemed to me, I know not how, this thing was done in
hell."

He came home and told his mother that she must send to the village and get a herd-boy ; he meant to look after the farm himself henceforth, he said. So it was settled ; and now the mother was ever about him, with tender admonitions not to do too much. She got into the habit, too, at this time, of giving him such dainty meals, that he often felt ashamed to eat them ; but he said nothing.

There was a song in his heart whose burden was : "Over the mountains high !" Somehow or other, he could not finish it, chiefly because

UPLAND KNUT

he wanted the refrain to come in every other line ; afterwards, he gave up that idea.

But many of the songs he made got spread about among the people, who liked them well. There were some who would have been glad to talk with him, especially such as had known about him from his childhood. But Arne was shy of all whom he did not know, and disliked them ; chiefly because he believed they disliked him.

At his side in all his field-work was a labourer, known as Upland Knut, a middle-aged man, who was in the habit of singing at times ; but it was always the same song that he sang. When this had gone on for some months, Arne thought he might ask him if he knew no other songs.

"No," answered the man.

Some days went by, and then, when the peasant was once more singing his song, Arne asked :

"How did you come to learn just that one song?"

"Ah!" replied the other, "it happened so."

Arne went from him straight home. There sat the mother, weeping—a thing he had not seen her do since his father's death. He made as if he had not noticed it, and turned to the

door again ; but he felt that the mother was looking at him mournfully, and had perforce to check his steps.

"Why are you crying, mother ? " he said.

For a moment or two, his words were the only sound in the room ; they seemed to keep repeating themselves to him, and he felt that they had not been spoken gently enough.

"Why are you crying, mother ? " he asked once more.

"Ah !" said the mother, weeping still more, "I don't really know."

He stood silent for a while, and then he said, as boldly as he could :

"There must be something you're weeping for."

There was silence again, and Arne began to feel very guilty, although she had not reproached him, and he knew of nothing he had done to pain her.

"I just felt fit to cry," said the mother, at length ; and then, after a pause, she added, "I'm really so happy at heart," and then she burst out weeping again.

But Arne hastened out, and his heart bore him

UPLAND KNUT

on to the ravine. He sat beside it, and looked down into it ; suddenly, as he was sitting so, he began to weep.

"If only I knew what these tears of mine are for!" said Arne.

Up above on the new-ploughed field sat Upland Knut, singing his song.

"Ingerid Sletten, of Sillegjord-mere,
Had neither of silver nor golden store ;
But hers was one treasure she valued far more,
For a gift 'twas of old from her mother so dear.

"Sure 'twas one of the plainest and simplest of things,
Just a hood for her head made of soft wool, dyed bright ;
But the thoughts of her mother that rose at its sight,
Made it fairer to her than the treasure of kings;

"So she took it with careful and reverent hand,
And for full twenty years did the hood lay aside :
'I will wear thee,' she said, 'if some day as a bride,
Little hood, at the altar all joyous I stand.'

"For thirty long years did it still lie aside,
She fearing to spoil it or wear it away ;
'O my own little hood,' she would often-times say,
'In God's presence I'll wear thee one day as a bride.'

"For forty long years it lay hidden away,
And Ingerid thought of her mother so dear ;
'Thee, my poor little hood,' cried she, 'never, I fear,
Shall I wear, if I wait for the glad bridal day.'

ARNE

"And her heart it was heavy with tears and with teen,
As she went to the box, forth her treasure to draw.
She looked at its place—that was all that she saw,
For there was not a thread of the hood to be seen."

Arne sat listening, as if music had fallen on his ear from the mountains far away. He went up to Knut.

"Have you a mother?" he asked.

"No."

"Have you a father?"

"Ah no! No father."

"Is it long since they died?"

"Ah yes! 'Twas long ago.

"I suppose you've not got very many friends?"

"Ah no! not many."

"Have you any here?"

"Ah no! not here."

"But you have some in your own village, I suppose?"

"Ah no! not there either."

"Have you no one at all, then, who cares for you?"

"Ah no! I have no one."

When Arne left him, he felt as if his heart was so full of love to his mother that it must

surely burst, and it seemed to him as if there was a halo of light about him.

"Thou God in Heaven," he thought, "Thou hast given me her, and with her such unspeakable love—and yet I put her aside; perhaps when I want to draw her to me again, she will be no more!" He felt he must go to her, if for nothing else, then just to see her. But on the way a sudden thought struck him. "What if, because you do not sufficiently prize her, you were to be punished by soon losing her?" He stood stock-still. "Almighty God!" he cried, "what would become of me then?"

At that moment, it seemed to him as if some terrible misfortune was taking place at home; he rushed toward the house, cold sweat breaking out on his brow, his feet scarcely touching the ground as he ran. He tore open the house door; once inside, it seemed as if the air was filled with peace. Gently he opened the door of the room. The mother was already in bed, and the moonbeams were shining upon her face. She lay there, sleeping like a child.

CHAPTER VI

ARNE'S STORY

SOME days later, mother and son, who had lately been more together, agreed to go to the wedding of some relatives at a neighbouring farm. The mother had not been to a party since she was a girl.

They scarcely knew the people there except by name, and to Arne especially it seemed strange how all looked at him wherever he was.

Something was said about him as he walked through the passage once; he was not quite certain what it was, but every drop of blood in his veins began to boil when he thought of it.

He kept following about and looking at the man who had said it; at last he took his seat beside him. But when they were at table, the man's conversation took quite a different turn.

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"Now I'll tell you a story," said he, "which shows that nothing can be hidden so deep down in the darkness but it comes to light some day." It seemed to Arne that the man was looking at him. He was an ugly-looking fellow, with thin red hair that overhung a wide, round forehead, below which were a pair of very small eyes, a little snub nose, and a very large mouth with pale, projecting lips. When he laughed he showed all his gums. His hands, which were on the table, were very large and coarse, though the wrists were slender enough. He looked keenly about, and spoke quickly, though with effort. He was nicknamed "Ugly Jaws," and Arne knew that Nils Skrædder had given him a rough time of it in the old days.

"Yes," went on the man, "there's much sin in this world; it is often nearer to us than we think—— Well, well! listen now to the story of an ugly deed. Those here who are old enough will remember Alf the Packman. 'Soon come again!' was Alf's saying, and people have got into the habit of saying it from him; for whenever he'd driven a good bargain—and what a hand he was at a bargain to be sure!—he threw

his pack on his back, and off he was, with a 'Soon come again!' O, a devil of a fellow was Alf!—a fine, jolly old boy was the packman.

"Well now, about him and Big Lazy. Big Lazy—why, you knew him, of course? Big he was, and lazy too—that's certain. Well, he fell in love with a jet-black pony of Alf's, which hopped like a grasshopper when the packman drove it; and before Big Lazy himself right well knew it, Alf had got him to give him fifty thalers for the nag! Into a carriage jumped Big Lazy, big as he was, to drive like the king with his fifty-thaler horse; but though he might curse it and lash it till the dust flew about in clouds, the horse ran full tilt against every door or wall that stood in its way; for it was stone-blind!

"Well now, whenever these two met they fell a-fighting about the horse, quarrelling all over the parish like two dogs. Big Lazy demanded his money back again, but never got a stiver of it: the packman beat him each time till he could drub him no longer. 'Soon come again!' said Alf, as he left him. O, a devil of a fellow was

ARNE'S STORY

Alf, I can tell you!—a fine, jolly old boy of a packman!

“Well now, years went by, and Alf never came again. Some ten years after this, however, a notice was given out from the church for him to come back, for a big fortune had been left him. Big Lazy stood by. ‘Ah!’ he said, ‘I knew well enough that it was not men but money that wanted Packman Alf back!’

“Then folks all began to talk about Alf in one place and another, and from all the gossip this much was certain, that he was last seen, not on the *other* side of the mountain ridge, but on *this* side. You remember the road over the ridge—the old road—don’t you?

“Now Big Lazy had, during the last few years, got very rich and prosperous, in his farm and in other property. He had also grown very religious, and every one knew that he didn’t become religious all of a sudden for nothing, not he—any more than any one else. These things set folks a-thinking.

“It was about this time that the way over the ridge was re-made. Our grandfathers liked to be able to go straight to a place, and so the

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road ran right over the ridge; but we want to have it all smooth and easy, so now the road goes down along by the river. Well, there was such a hubbub with all the blasting and mining, that you might have thought the whole mountain-side was coming down. All sorts of people connected with the work gathered there, but most frequently of all came the mayor, for he travelled to and fro without payment. Well, one day, as the workmen were digging away the rocky earth, a man grasped what he thought was a stone, but it was a hand, sticking out amid the stones, and so strong was the hand that the man who touched it fell back at the touch—and that man was Big Lazy.

“The mayor was not far off; he was fetched at once, and all the bones of a man were dug out. The doctor too was fetched, and he put all the bones together so cunningly that all it now lacked was flesh. And now folks began to declare that the skeleton was just the size of Alf the Packman. ‘Soon come again!’ said Alf the Packman.

“Well now, one and another began to think it queer that a dead hand could knock down a

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fellow like Big Lazy, especially without striking him. The mayor straightway took him where they could not be overheard, and taxed him with the murder outright. But then Big Lazy swore he was innocent with such oaths that the mayor turned faint.

“ ‘Well, well! if it wasn't you, you're man enough to pass the night with the skeleton, aren't you?’

“ ‘Yes, of course I am!’ answered Big Lazy.

“So the doctor bound the bones at the joints, and laid the skeleton on one of the beds in the barrack-room. Big Lazy was to lie in the other bed, while the mayor, wrapped round in his cloak, kept close to the wall on the other side. When it was dark, and time for Big Lazy to join his bed-fellow, the door seemed to close behind him of its own accord, and shut him off from the light. But Big Lazy began to sing hymns, for he had a very strong voice.

“ ‘Why are you singing hymns?’ asked the mayor from without.

“ ‘Because I don't know whether bells were ever tolled and hymns sung for him,’ answered Big Lazy.

ARNE

"Presently he began to pray as hard as he could.

" 'Why are you praying?' asked the mayor from without.

" 'Because he was a fearful sinner,' answered Big Lazy.

"Then for a long time all was so still that the mayor had very nearly fallen asleep. Suddenly there was an awful scream, that shook the whole building.

" 'Soon come again!' it rang out. There was the noise of fiendish confusion within.

" 'Let's have those fifty dollars of mine!' roared Big Lazy, and then came a scream and a crash. The mayor burst open the door; in rushed the people with sticks and torches, and there lay Big Lazy in the middle of the floor, and on top of him the skeleton!"

There was unbroken silence all round the table. At length one said, lighting his clay pipe the while:

"He went mad from that day, didn't he?"

"He did."

Arne felt as if all eyes were on him, and he could not muster courage to look up.

ARNE'S STORY

"I say, as I said before," resumed the man who had told the story, "there's nothing can be hidden so deep down in the darkness but it comes to light some day."

"Well, now," said a fair-haired, thick-set, round-faced man, "I'll tell you about a son who struck his own father."

Arne felt as if he scarce knew where he was sitting.

"There was once a quarrelsome, bullying fellow," the man went on, "belonging to a good family down there in Hardanger, and he had got the better of many a man. Now, he and his father had a quarrel about money matters, and this made him as cantankerous at home as he was abroad.

"Well, his goings-on grew worse and worse, and his father kept getting more and more angry with him. 'No one shall be my master!' said the son. 'That shall I,' said the father, 'as long as I live.'

"'If you don't be quiet, I'll strike you!' said the son, and he raised his arm.

"'Just you dare, and you'll never have a moment's happiness in this world,' said the father, raising himself too.

ARNE

“ ‘Think so?’ said the son, and he fell upon the other and threw him to the ground. But the father made no resistance: he only folded his arms and let him do as he would.

“The son beat him, laid hold of him, and pulled him to the door.

“ ‘I *will* have peace at home!’ he cried.

“But when they got to the door, the father half raised himself.

“ ‘No further than the door!’ he cried; ‘just so far as that did I drag my own father!’

“The son paid no heed; he dragged his father’s head over the threshold.

“ ‘No further than the door, I tell you!’ cried the old man. He got up, threw his son to the ground at his feet, and beat him like a child.”

“What an awful story!” cried several voices.

“How shocking to strike one’s father!” Arne seemed to hear some one saying; but he was not certain.

“Now *I’ll* tell you something,” said Arne; and he got up, pale as a corpse, and not knowing what he was to say. All he saw was words whirling about him like great snowflakes. “Let

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me catch them as they fly," he thought, and he began :

"A troll once met a boy walking along the road and crying. 'Whom are you most afraid of?' asked the troll, 'yourself, or somebody else?'

"Now, the boy was crying, as it happened, because the night before he had dreamed that he had been obliged to kill his wicked father, so he answered :

" 'Myself.'

" 'Be at peace with yourself, then, and never weep again ; for henceforth you shall be at variance only with others.' And so saying the troll went his way.

"Now the first person whom the boy met laughed scornfully at him, and the boy could not but sneer at him in return. The next whom he met dealt him a blow, and the boy, to defend himself, struck back. The third whom he met tried to kill him, so the boy had to kill *him*.

"And now every one began to speak ill of the boy, so that he had nothing but ill to speak of every one. They locked all their cupboards

and bolted their doors, so that whatever he needed he must perforce steal: even his night's lodging he was forced to get by stealth. And now that he was unable to find anything good to do, he must needs find something evil. Then all the parish began to be saying: 'Really we must get rid of this boy, he is so wicked.' So one fine day they took him and put him out of pain. Now the boy himself had no idea that he had done anything wrong, and so after death he went straight to our Lord's presence. There on one bench sat his father (whom, as you know, he had not killed), and on another, just opposite him, all those who had been the cause of his doing evil.

"'Which bench are you afraid of?' said God. The boy pointed to the long row of faces.

"'Sit down by your father, then,' said our Lord; and the boy went to do so—but just then down tumbled the father from the bench, with a great wound in his neck. In place of him sat the figure of the boy himself, but with horror-stricken face and features pale as death. Then came another figure of himself, this time with a drunkard's face, and bloated, drink-

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swollen body ; and after him one with vacant eyes, torn garments, and horrid laughter.

“ ‘ Even as one of these might *you* have been,’ said our Lord.

“ ‘ Even as these !’ repeated the boy, and he put out his hand to touch God’s garment. At that, down fell both benches from the heavens, and the boy stood there before his God’s face and laughed.

“ ‘ Think on that when you awake !’ said our Maker—and at that moment the boy awoke.

“ Now the boy who dreamed all this was I, and those who tempt him by thinking ill of him are—you ! Myself I no longer fear ; but of you I am indeed afraid. Call not out the evil in me ; for I know not whether it will be granted *me* to touch the garment of our Lord.”

He dashed out of the room, and all the people looked at one another.

CHAPTER VII

SELF-REPROACH

It was the day after, in the barn of that same farm. ' Arne had drunk too much, for the first time in his life. It had upset him, and he had lain in the barn there for the best part of the four-and-twenty hours. He was sitting up now, leaning on his elbows and talking to himself.

" Everything, I see, can be brought home to my cowardice. I didn't run away when I was a boy—that was cowardice ; I heeded father more than mother—that was cowardice ; I sang horrid songs to him—that was cowardice ; I took up with going with the cattle to pasture, just out of cowardice ; with reading—yes, that was cowardice, too—I only wanted to hide from myself. Even when I was no longer a boy, I didn't take mother's part against father—coward that I was ! and even that night—

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coward! coward!—I did not—coward! I should very likely have done nothing till he had killed her! Afterwards I could no longer endure home—coward! yet I didn't go away either—coward! I just did nothing; I went and watched the cattle—coward! It's true I had promised mother to stay with her; but I'm sure I should have been coward enough to break my word at any time, if I hadn't been afraid of mixing with people; for the truth is I am afraid of people, chiefly because I think they see what a wretched creature I am. But just because I *am* afraid of them I go and talk evil of them—confounded coward that I am. It's only out of cowardice that I make songs. I dare not think of my own affairs, so I go and dip in other folks'—and that's making poetry!

“I've had reason enough for weeping till the hills turned to lakes, yet I say to myself, ‘Hush, hush,’ and rock myself to sleep. Why, even my songs are cowardly: if they were bolder, they'd be far better. I'm afraid of all bold thought: I fear everything that's strong; if I force myself to it, it's only when I'm in a passion—and passion is mere weak cowardice.

ARNE

I'm cleverer, abler, wiser than I seem—I'm better than I appear from my talk—but yet, such is my cowardice, I dare not seem to be just what I am. Why, look here! that brandy yesterday I only drank from cowardice; I wanted to drown my thoughts! Ah, I was doing wrong, I knew; but I went on drinking and drinking—I drank my father's life-blood and my own wits away! Why, my cowardice is altogether without limits; and most cowardly of all is it that I can loll here and tell myself all this.

“Kill myself? stuff and nonsense! I'm much too much of a coward for that! Besides, I believe in God—yes, I do believe in God—and I'd go to Him gladly enough too, but my cowardice keeps me from Him. Everything would be changed and different then, and that's just what a coward like me shudders away from. But suppose I tried—tried with all my might? Almighty God! suppose I were to try. I say, would'st Thou amend me in such way as my frail strength could endure? for there is neither bone nor sinew in me; all is as quavering jelly. But suppose I were to try—with good and

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gentle books (I fear all strong writings); with beautiful tales and legends, and all that is comforting; with a sermon every Sunday and a prayer every evening; and with regular, steady work, so that religion may find fitting soil—for that it cannot in idleness. If I were to try—dear gentle God of my childhood! let me try to come to Thee!”

Some one opened the door, and dashed across to him; it was his mother, her face pale as death, though it was bathed in perspiration. This was the second day of her search for her son. She had been crying his name aloud, and without waiting to listen for his answer, going on crying aloud and running about, till he called out to her from amid the hay on which he lay. Then she uttered one shrill scream, sprang upon the heap of hay, more lightly than a boy, and folded him in her arms.

“Oh, Arne! Arne! are you here?” she sobbed. “Have I really found you at last? I have been looking for you ever since yesterday evening: I have been searching all night. My poor, poor Arne! I saw they had been treating you shamefully. I did so want to talk

ARNE

with you and console you !—Arne ! I saw you were drinking too much ! God Almighty ! may I never see that again !” It was long before she could go on again. “Jesus guard you, my son,” she sobbed. “I saw you drinking ! and then all of a sudden you had got away from me, all dazed with drink and worry as you were, and I ran about everywhere to find you : I went into every house ; I ran far out into the fields ; I peered into every ditch ; I asked everybody I met ; I came here, too, but you did not answer my call. O Arne, Arne ! I went along by the river, but it did not seem anywhere deep enough to——” And she pressed him closer to her.

“That made me feel calmer, and I thought you must surely have gone home, and I hurried back, and got there in a quarter of an hour. I opened the doors and looked in every room, and not till then did I remember that I had the key myself, so that you could not possibly have got in there. Arne ! last night I searched every inch of the road on both sides ; I did not dare o go and look at the precipice ! How I came here again I don’t know ; there was no one to

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help me, but somehow God put it into my mind that you must be here."

He tried to soothe her as best he could.

"Arne!" she burst out, "you'll never drink brandy again, will you?"

"No, you may be sure of that."

"They must have behaved badly to you—they *did* behave badly to you, didn't they?"

"Ah no! it was I who was a *coward*," replied he, laying stress on the last word.

"I don't understand how they could treat you unkindly. But what was it they did to you? You never will tell me anything." And she began to weep again.

"But you never tell me anything either," returned Arne, in a gentle voice.

"Still, it's your fault most, Arne; I have grown so used to say nothing from your father's days, that I need you to help me a little to speak! Good God! there's only we two; and we have suffered so much together."

"Let us see if we cannot make things go better for the future," whispered he. "Next Sunday I'll read out the sermon to you."

"God bless you for that!" she murmured.

ARNE

Presently she began again.

"Arne!"

"Yes."

"There is something I ought to tell you."

"Tell it me, mother."

"I am bearing a great sin for your sake: I have done a wicked thing."

"You, mother!" he cried. And it moved him so to think that his loving-hearted, ever-patient mother should reproach herself for having sinned against him, who never did anything really kind for her, that he threw his arms round her, kissed her, and burst into tears.

"Yes, I! and yet I couldn't help doing it."

"O mother, you've never done anything wrong against me, I know."

"Yes, I have; God knows it was only because I loved you so. But you will forgive me for it, won't you?"

"I'll forgive you, never fear."

"And some other time I'll tell it you—but you'll forgive me for it, won't you?"

"Yes, yes, mother."

"You see, that's really why it's been so hard

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for me to talk with you—I have had this sin against you on my mind.”

“Good God! don’t talk so, mother.”

“At any rate, I’m glad now that I’ve been able to tell you that much.”

“Mother, we must talk together more, you and I.”

“That we will—and you’ll really read the sermon to me, won’t you?”

“That I will.”

“God bless you, my poor, poor Arne!”

“I think now we had better go home.”

“Yes, home.”

“Why do you look about you like that, mother?”

“It was in this very barn your father lay and wept.”

“Father?” cried Arne, turning pale.

“Poor Nils! it was the day you were christened,” said Margit. “Why do you look about you like that, Arne?”

CHAPTER VIII

ELI

FROM the day on which Arne had tried with all his heart to join his life more closely to his mother's, his attitude towards other people began quite to alter. He looked at them now more with his mother's gentle eyes. But he often found it hard to remain true to his purpose ; for the things that were most in his thoughts were often quite beyond his mother's understanding. Here is a song he made about this time :

" So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow ;
So out to the beech-grove I wended my way,
And myself on my back did I throw.
But the midge 'gan to sting, and the ant 'gan to creep,
And the gadfly buzzed out at me, ' Wake from thy sleep ! ' "

" Won't you go out this glorious day, dear ? " said the mother, who sat singing by the threshold.

ELI

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow ;
So I sang on the hill-side, as dreaming I lay,
Of fair maidens and days long ago.
But some serpents approached me, a good three ells long,
And chased me away from my meadow and song."

"It's such beautiful weather, one could go barefoot," said the mother ; and she drew off her stockings.

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow ;
I longed for a plunge in the cool of the bay,
So far out on the fjord did I row.
But fiercely the sun came, my skin to attack :
And that was too much, so I rowed the boat back."

"Now, this is the sort of day for the hay to get dry in," said the mother ; and she pushed a hay-rake deep into it.

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow ;
To the depth of the greenwood, where venturesome ray
Ne'er pierces, I hopefully go.
But a worm from a tree tumbled down on my face :
'Fiend take you,' cried I, and I rushed from the place."

"Well, if the cow doesn't find plenty to eat to-day," said the mother, "she never will." And she glanced up towards the pasture.

ARNE

"So lovely and bright was the fair summer's day,
That the house seemed oppressive to grow ;
I bathed in the waterfall's silvery spray,
' Now here can befall me no woe ! '
Alas ! I was drowned in the golden sunshine—
But if this is so, then this song isn't mine."

"Three such sunny days, and all the hay will be got safely in," said the mother. And away she went to make his bed.

Nevertheless, Arne's intercourse with his mother grew every day more and more of a comfort to her. The things she was unable to understand produced a relationship to her quite as well as the things she *did* understand ; for just because she did not grasp them, he thought over her difficulties more and more ; and she herself grew dearer to him for his finding her boundaries in all directions. Yes, she was very, very dear to him !

Arne had not cared much for stories when he was a boy, but now, as a young man, he was seized with a passion for them, and then for the national sagas and heroic songs. A strange longing possessed his soul. He went about alone much of his time now ; and many a place he had never looked at before now seemed to him

marvellously fair. While he was being prepared for confirmation, he had often gone with his class fellows and played beside a great piece of water near the parsonage called, from its depth and darkness, the Black Lake. This water now began to come into his thoughts again, and one evening he wandered down to it.

He sat down behind some bushes close by the parsonage, which lay on the slope of a very steep hill that rose high behind it. The opposite shore was of the same shape, so that all sorts of strange shadowy forms were playing on the lake from both sides ; but out in the middle was a broad shimmering band of silver water.

All was peace. The sun was beginning to set ; there came the faint chime of bells from the opposite shore, and save that there was no sound. Arne did not look straight across ; at first his eyes were fixed on the surface of the waters, for the sun just before sinking was shedding a deep red glow over them. There was a break in the mountains, making a long, low vale, in which the waters plashed ; it looked as if the crags grew together again in order to encompass the intervening dale.

Homestead 'touched homestead in the valley beyond ; the smoke rose up from them and curled away ; the fields shone with verdant moisture, and boats laden with hay lay by the shore. He could see many folks moving about, but he heard no sound. His eye turned from them to the strand, from which rose naught save God's dark woods, through which, by the water's edge, the path of mankind was pointed out as by a finger, for all the way a winding streak of dust was plain to see. With his eye he followed it till he reached the point just opposite to where he sat ; there the wood ceased, the mountains broke, and farm upon farm filled the gap. There were red-painted houses, larger than those in the lower valley and with bigger windows, which just now were red too in the setting sun. The hills were all alight with bright rays : the smallest child at play there could be seen, distinct and plain ; bright by the water's edge the sand shone white, children and dogs gleefully disporting themselves thereon. But suddenly all grew sun-forsaken and gloomy, the houses dusky-red, the herbage black green, the sand grey-white, the children little shapeless lumps. A mist had sprung up

over the mountain-side and shut out the face of the sun. But Arne looked down into the waters, and found all the scene pictured there again. The smiling corn-fields waved before him, the woods stept silently into his view. There stood the dwelling-houses gazing calmly down, with doors open, and children passing in and out. Mystic fancies, strange memories of childhood circled round him like fish around the bait; away they darted, back they ventured again, to and fro they sported, but never did they let themselves be caught.

"Let us sit down here till your mother comes back; the pastor's lady must get done some time or other, after all."

Arne started up; somebody had plainly seated himself right behind him.

"Oh! I would so like to stay just this one night more," said a supplicating, tearful voice—a voice evidently belonging to a young girl not yet quite grown up.

"Now, don't cry any more," answered the gentle but deliberate voice of a man; "it's not nice of you to keep crying because you're to go home to your mother."

ARNE

"That's not why I'm crying."

"Why are you crying, then."

"Because I can't be with Mathilde any more."

(This was the name of the pastor's only daughter. Arne called to mind now that a young country girl had been brought up along with her.)

"Well, that couldn't go on for ever, you know."

"Yes, but only just one day more!" And her sobs burst forth again.

"It's best for you to come back home with us now; perhaps, as it is, it's too late."

"Too late! what do you mean? Did ever girl hear the like?"

"You were born a country girl, and a country girl you must remain; we're not the sort of people to have a fine lady."

"I could have kept on being a country girl however much I stayed there."

"You can't judge of that."

"I've always worn country girl's clothes."

"That's not what makes a country girl."

"I've spun, too, and woven, and cooked."

"That's not it, either."

‘ I can talk just as you and mother do.’

“ Nor is that it, either.”

“ Well, then, I don’t rightly know *what* it is !” said the girl, and she laughed.

“ We shall see,” replied the other. “ One thing I’m afraid of is that you’ve got too many ideas in your head already.”

“ Ideas, ideas ! that’s what you’re always saying. I haven’t got a single one, I tell you.” And she fell a-weeping again.

“ Little weathercock that you are !” ejaculated the man.

“ Weathercock indeed ! The pastor never called me that.”

“ Well, then, *I* do.”

“ Weathercock, weathercock ! Did ever girl hear the like ? I won’t be called weathercock, I tell you !”

“ Well, what will you be called, then ?”

“ What will I be called ? Oh dear, there’s a thing to say ! I’ll be called nothing.”

“ Very well, let’s call you ‘ Nothing,’ then.”

At this the girl began to laugh, but a moment after she said, quite gravely :

“ It’s horrid of you to call me ‘ Nothing.’”

"Good heavens! didn't you ask me yourself?"

"No. I will not be 'Nothing.'"

"Very well, dear; be 'Everything.'"

Again the girl began to laugh, then immediately, with reproachful voice, she said:

"The pastor never used to fool me like that."

"No, he was content with making you a fool."

"The pastor did! Why, you've never been so kind to me as he was!"

"It would have been too bad if I had."

"Oh yes! sour milk can ne'er get sweet."

"Yes, it can, if it's cooked to whey."

At this her laughter burst forth.

"There comes your mother," said he.

Straightway she was all seriousness again.

"Such a chattering creature as that pastor's wife I've never met in all my born days," came from a sharp, strident voice. "Hurry up now, Baard; get up and push off the boat, else we sha'n't be home to-night. She kept telling me I was to take care Eli always kept her feet dry—why, she can take care of that herself, I suppose. She's to go for a walk every morning, she says, because of her delicate health. 'Delicate health' here and 'delicate health' there it was with her,

ELI

I can tell you. But get up, Baard, do, and push off the boat—why, I've got bread-baking to look after this evening yet."

"The box hasn't come yet," answered the man, without stirring.

"The box isn't going to come; it's to stay there till next Sunday. And you, Eli! don't you hear? Get up, I say; pick up your bundle and come along. Come, get up, Baard, do!"

She moved away, the girl following, the woman's "get up, and come, do!" still coming from the distance below.

"Have you seen to the plug in the boat?" asked Baard, without moving.

"Yes, it's in all right;" and Arne heard her immediately knock it in with a baler. "But get up, do, Baard! we are not to stop here all night, are we?"

"I'm waiting for the box."

"Bless me! haven't I told you it's to stay here till next Sunday?"

"Here it comes," said Baard. And they heard the rattle of wheels.

"Why, I told them," said the woman, "it was to stay over till Sunday."

"And I said it was to come with us."

The woman, without a word, went straight up to the cart, took out of it a bundle, a lunch-bag, and some small things, and bore them off to the boat. Then Baard raised himself, went to the cart, and carried the box down unaided.

But following the cart came running a girl in a straw hat, her hair fluttering about her: it was the pastor's daughter.

"Eli! Eli!" she cried from the distance.

"Mathilde! Mathilde!" came the answer, as Eli dashed up to meet her.

They met on the hill-side, weeping in each other's embrace. Presently Mathilde took up something she had set down on the grass: it was a bird-cage.

"You are to have Narrifas—you must take him. Mother wants you to, too. Yes, you *must* take Narrifas after all, and then you'll often think of me—and often, very often, row across to me here." And at that both fell a-crying again.

"Eli! Come, come, Eli! Don't stick there!" came a summons from below.

"I'll come with you, that I will," said

Mathilde; I'll go across with you and sleep with you to-night."

"Yes, yes, yes!" And with arms round one another's necks, down they went to the landing-place. A moment after, and Arne saw the boat out in the water, Eli standing up in the stern, holding the bird-cage, and waving her hand to Mathilde, who was sitting on a stone by the landing-stage, bitterly weeping.

She sat there as long as the boat was in sight on the water: it was not far across to the red houses, and Arne remained in his place. His eyes followed the boat even as hers did. Presently it was on the black strip of water in the shadows, and he watched it draw near to the land. He could see the three forms mirrored in the water, and thus he followed them all along the houses, till they came to the best of them all. He saw the mother go in first, then the father with the chest, and lastly the daughter, for he could distinguish them by their different statures. Presently the daughter came out again and sat down by the granary door, most likely to get a last glimpse of the other side, as the sun lit it up with his last rays. But the

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pastor's daughter was gone, and there was no one there but Arne, who sat there looking at her image in the water. "Perhaps she sees me now," was in his heart.

He rose and went. The sun had set, but the heavens were blue and clear as they only are sometimes on summer nights. Clouds of vapour arose from land and water on both sides of the mountains ; but the peaks stood free and unembarrassed as they looked at one another. He went up the hill-side ; the water grew blacker and deeper and denser in his eyes. The valley below grew narrower, and seemed to be getting closer to the water's edge ; the peaks seemed to grow nearer together, making more of a solid mass—for the bright sun-rays separate them. The heavens themselves came nearer to earth, and all things were in amity and repose.

CHAPTER IX

A NUTTING PARTY

ARNE'S fancy now began to play with dreams of love and fair maidens ; his old ballads and romances made him behold them in a mystic mirror like the young girl he had seen mirrored in the water. He was for ever looking into it, and from that night the fancy took him to sing of it too ; for now love had come, so to speak, nearer to him. But his thoughts sped away from him, and came back with a song that seemed to him all unknown ; it was as if some one else had composed it for him :

" Fair Venevil hastened, with light-tripping feet,
Her lover to greet.
She sang till the air bore the echo away,
' Good day, and good day ! '
And all the small singing-birds twittered this lay :
' On St. Hans's eve,
All their toil will leave,
Who knows if she then may her bridal wreath weave ? '

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- " She weaves him a garland of blossoms blue,
 'Of my eyes the hue!'
He glanced at them, dropped them, then took the flowers
 gay.
 'Fair maiden, good day!'
He left her, and sang as he went on his way :
 'On St. Hans's eve,
 All their toil will leave,
Who knows if she then may her bridal wreath weave?'
- " She weaves him another. 'Ah, think it fair!
 'Tis my golden hair.'
Then she coaxing raised, as the words she said,
 Her mouth so red :
He kissed it, and blushed, and away he sped.
- " She wove one white as a lily band.
 'See! 'tis my right hand!'
And one, blood-red as love's agony,
 'Tis the left, for thee :'
He took them both, but away turned he.
- " But still would the maiden her garlands bind—
 'Tis all I can find!'
While over her flowerets fell many a tear,
 'Take all that is here!'
He took them in silence, and fled as in fear.
- " She wove one, pure as the pale moon's ray,
 'For my bridal day!'
She wove till the blood left her fingers fair,
 'Now love, deck my hair!'
But ah! when she sought him no lover was there.
- " She wove and she tarried not, day or night,
 'At her bride-wreath white.'
Summer, and flowers, and St. Hans's day
 All have passed away.

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Still in dreams she is weaving her garland gay.

' On St. Hans's eve,

All their toil will leave,

Who knows if she then may her bridal wreath weave ? ' "

* * * * *

It was the melancholy in his heart that gave such a gloomy cast to the first vision of love that came over his soul. Two heart's-desires—the yearning to have some one to love, and the longing to do some great thing—sprang up together in his soul, and melted into one. It was now that he began to work again at the song, “Over the mountains high”—ever altering it, singing it over to himself, and thinking each time, “It'll yet carry me off some time or another: I'll go on singing it till I pluck up courage enough.” He did not, however, forget his mother in his thoughts of travel; but he consoled himself with the thought that he would send for her as soon as he had got a footing abroad, and could offer her a life such as he never could hope to get, either for himself or for her, at home. But in the midst of his great yearnings there played around him something serene, yet bright and tender, that seemed to dart hither and thither, lay hold of him, and

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anon fly off again; so that, dreamer as he had now become, he was more thoroughly in the power of involuntary fancies than he himself knew.

There was in the parish a merry old fellow of the name of Ejnar Aasen; he had broken his leg when twenty years of age, and since that time walked with a crutch, but wherever he appeared limping along on his crutch, there was always some merriment forward. The man was well-to-do; there was a great nut-copse on his land, and it was a regular thing for a troop of merry girls to come together at his house on one of the finest days in autumn, and go a-nutting. They were grandly entertained by him in the day-time, and there was dancing for them at night. To most of them he had stood sponsor—for he stood sponsor to half the parish: all children called him "Godfather," and young and old alike followed their example.

Now Godfather and Arne were well acquainted, and the man liked the lad for his songs, so he invited him to join them in the nutting party. Arne blushed and refused. "He was not used to being among women," he said.

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"Better get used to it now, then," answered Godfather.

Arne could not sleep of a night for thinking of it; fear and longing were at strife within him. However, in the long run he not only went, but, what is more, was in fact the only young man among all these girls.

He could not deny that he felt a sense of disillusion; these were not the maidens of whom he had made songs, nor yet were they those he had feared to encounter. They were more full of life than anything he had ever seen, and the first thing which struck him was that they could make merry over anything in the world; and if three of them had anything to laugh at, incontinently five fell a-laughing just because the three laughed. They behaved, too, as if they all shared one another's daily life; yet there were some there who had never met till that day. If they got hold of the branch they sprang up at, they laughed; and, if they missed it, they laughed too. They struggled for the nutting-hook to catch the branches with. Those who got it laughed; those who failed to get it laughed too. Godfather hopped after

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them with his crutch, and teased them as much as he could. Those whom he caught laughed because he caught them; those he failed to catch laughed because he failed to catch them. And all of them laughed at Arne because he was serious-looking, so that he could not help laughing too; and that made them laugh at him because he laughed himself at last.

They seated themselves finally on a big knoll—Godfather in the midst, and all the girls about him. There was a wide expanse around them, and the sun was burning hot; but the girls cared little for that, as they pelted one another with shells and husks, and gave Godfather the kernels. Godfather kept ordering them to be still, and striking out at them as far as he could reach with his crutch; for now he wanted them to begin telling tales, and merry ones, if possible. But to get them to tell stories seemed harder than to stop a runaway cart going down hill. Godfather began, but many of them would not listen, for they knew his tales from of old, they said; but gradually they were all earnestly listening; and before they knew, they were sitting there, telling the best they could. And

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what astonished Arne most was that their stories were now as serious as before their merriment had been noisy. Most of them ran on love.

"Now then, Aasa, you've got a good one, I remember, from last year," said Godfather, turning to a healthy, good-natured looking, round-faced lass, who sat with her little sister's head on her lap, plaiting her hair.

"I expect lots of them know that," she answered.

"Let's have it, anyway," they urged.

"Well, I won't wait to be pressed, then," said she; and straightway she began her story, plaiting her sister's hair all the while she told it.

"Once upon a time there was a young man, who used to go tending the cattle: he liked to drive them up to a certain broad river. A bit higher up there was a crag, which jutted out so far over the stream that he could make himself heard from it on the other side. Now, over on that other side was a girl tending her flocks; he could see her all day long, but he could not get over to her. Day after day he questioned her:

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“ ‘ Who art thou, O maid, by the river sitting,
Blowing the horn, and for ever knitting.’

“ Till at last he got for answer :

“ ‘ My name it swims, like the gull on the sea.
O, lad with the fur cap, come over to me.’

“ At this the boy was just as wise as he was before ; so he thought he wouldn’t trouble about her any more. But this wasn’t so easy to do, for let him drive his herd wherever he pleased, it was sure to lead him somehow or other back to the crag again. So at last the lad grew frightened, and he shouted at her :

“ ‘ How call they thy father, and where dost thou dwell ?
Ne’er in church have I seen thee. Fair maiden, then tell.

“ The fact is, the lad began half to believe that she was a troll.

“ ‘ O, drowned is my father, my house it is burnt,
And the way to the church have I never yet learnt.’

“ But this, too, left the lad as wise as he was before. He spent all his days now at the crag, and at night he dreamt that she danced round him, lashing out at him with a great cow-whip whenever he tried to catch her. At last he

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could not sleep by night or work by day, so that he fell into a wretched condition.

“ ‘ If thou art a fairy, then far from me flee ;
But if mortal maiden, then answer to me.’ ”

“ Yet she made no answer, so now he felt certain she was a troll. He gave up tending the cattle, but that did him no good, for wherever he was, and whatever he was doing, his thoughts were always of the fair troll playing on the horn.

“ Well, one day, as he was standing chopping up wood, there came through the yard a young girl who was the very image of the troll ; but when she came nearer, he saw it was not she. He was still thinking of this when the girl came back again, and, at a distance, she was so exactly like the troll, that he ran up to her at once. But when he came near it was not she, all the same.

“ After this, wherever the lad went—to church, to a dance, or to any gathering of any sort—he always saw this girl. Some way off from him she seemed his troll exactly, but close at hand she was different ; so at last he asked

her if it was she or not, but she only laughed at him. 'Well, well,' thought the lad, 'I may as well jump in as slip in,' so he went and married the girl.

"Well, when he had done this, he no longer liked the girl. When away from her he was always longing for her, but when he was with her he was always yearning for one whom he could not see. Hence the lad did not treat his wife kindly; but she bore with him in patient silence.

"Now one day, as he was going after some horses, his way took him up to the crag, and he sat down there and sang :

" 'Like moonlight far over the cliffs dost thou play,
And like Will-o'-the-Wisp shines thy far-distant ray.'

"It seemed to him good to sit there, and from that time he often went to the crag, when he was discontented with home. But each time, when he had gone out, his wife fell a-weeping.

"One day, as he sat there, there, on the other side, before his very eyes, sat the troll, blowing her horn.

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“ ‘ Ah ! there thou art, fair one ! oh, blow once again,
While lonely I listen, and weep in my pain.’ ”

“ Then she answered :

“ ‘ Till the dreams have gone out of your head I will blow,
For at home the corn ripens, and home you must go.’ ”

“ At this the lad grew frightened, and went back to his home. But, before very long, he grew so tired of his wife again, that he couldn't help going to the crag over the river in the wood. Then he heard singing :

“ ‘ I dreamed that thou camest ; now hasten to find me ;
But if thou wouldst do so, then look well behind thee.’ ”

“ The lad started up and looked around him : the end of a green skirt twinkled away among the bushes. After it dashed he : then followed a chase through the wood. Fleet of foot as the troll no human being could be. He cast spells at her time after time, but she ran on just as well as before. But at last she began to grow weary, as the lad could see from the way she ran ; he could see, too, more and more clearly, from his view of her figure, that she was his troll, and no other.

“ ‘ Now you shall certainly be mine,’ thought

the lad, and suddenly he dashed at her so impetuously that both he and the troll fell, and rolled far down the hill together before they could stop themselves.

"Then the troll laughed, so that it seemed to the lad the mountains sang again. He clasped her to his heart, and she was fair as he had wished his own wife to be.

" 'Who art thou, oh, beauteous maid?' asked the lad, and he stroked her soft cheeks, which were glowing.

" 'Dear heart,' answered the troll, 'I am only your own wife.' "

The girls laughed and made merry over the lad's folly. Godfather turned to Arne, and asked him if he had been listening carefully.

"Well, now *I'll* tell you something," cried a little lass, with a little round face and a little round nose.

"There was once a little fellow who wanted very much to make love to a little girl; they were both quite old enough, but they were both such little things. The boy could never pluck up courage enough to begin. He kept close to her at church-time, but never could talk to her

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of anything but the weather. He followed her about at dances, and almost danced her to death; yet he could not manage to talk to her.

“ ‘You must learn to write,’ said he to himself, at last, ‘so you’ll not need to say it’; and off he went to learn writing.

“He kept thinking he could not write well enough, so that he was a whole year before he ventured to write the letter. Then it was necessary to get it given her without any one seeing it. So one day, as they happened to be alone together behind the church, the lad said :

“ ‘I’ve got a letter for you.’

“ ‘But,’ answered the girl, ‘I can’t read writing.’

“So there he was at a standstill again.

“Well, the lad went into her father’s service, and never let her be out of his sight all day long. Once he had very nearly managed to ask her: he had just got his mouth open, when in flew a great fly.

“ ‘Suppose some one were to come and take her from me!’ thought he; but nobody came and took her from him, because she was so little.

"At last, however, somebody *did* come, and he was little too. The lad saw at once what the new comer meant, so, when they went up to the loft together, the lad ran and placed himself at the key-hole. Then the stranger inside began to make love to her.

"'Oh!' groaned the lad to himself, 'what a noodle I must have been, not to have been quicker about it myself.'

"Then the wooer inside kissed the girl on the lips.

"'Ah, that tasted nice, I daresay,' snarled the lad to himself.

"Then the lover inside took the girl on his knee.

"'Oh, what a world we live in!' moaned the lad, and he burst out crying.

"The girl heard the noise, and went to the door.

"'What is it you want of me, horrid boy, that I never can get a moment's peace because of you?'

"'I want? I only wanted to ask to be your best man.'

"'No; that one of my brothers shall be,' answered the girl, and she slammed the door.

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"And there stood the boy, alone again."

The girls laughed loudly at this tale, and began to pelt each other vigorously with nutshells again.

Godfather wanted Eli Böen to tell them something now.

"Yes, but what was it to be?" she asked.

Why, let her tell them what she had told him, last time he was over the hills at her people's house, when she gave him the new garters.

It was long before Eli could be got to begin, because she was laughing so; but at last she said:

"A boy and a girl were once walking together along a road.

"'Look at that thrush following us,' said the girl.

"'Following me, you mean,' said the boy.

"'Just as likely me as you,' answered the girl.

"'That's easy to see,' retorted the boy; 'you go by the lower road and I'll go by the upper, and we'll meet up there at the end.'

"They did as he said.

“ ‘Well,’ said the boy, when they met again, ‘it followed me, you see.’

“ ‘Why, it followed me,’ answered the girl.

“ ‘There must be two of them,’ said he.

“They walked on together again for a while, but there was only one bird now. The boy insisted it was flying along on his side, but the girl was just as positive it was on hers.

“ ‘I don’t care a pin for the old thrush,’ said the boy, at last.

“ ‘Nor do I, then,’ answered the girl.

“But no sooner had they said this, than the thrush disappeared.

“ ‘It was on *your* side, after all,’ said the boy.

“ ‘No, thank you. I saw plainly enough it was on yours,’ retorted she. ‘But look; here he is come again,’ she cried.

“ ‘Yes, so he is. Well, he’s on my side now, at any rate,’ shouted the boy.

“At this the girl lost her temper.

“ ‘I’d rather do anything than walk along with a horrid thing like you!’ And she went her own way.

“At this, the thrush flew away from the boy ;

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and he found it so tedious, that he began to call her name.

"She answered.

" 'Is the thrush with you ? ' shouted the boy.

" 'No ; isn't he with you ? ' "

" 'No, no. Why don't you come back here ; then perhaps he'll come to.' "

"So the girl came back, and they took one another's hands and walked along together.

" 'Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, ! ' came from the girl's side of the way.

" 'Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet ! ' came from the boy's side.

" 'Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet ! ' came from all sides ; and when they looked to see where it came from, they saw a hundred thousand million thrushes round them.

" 'Oh, how lovely ! ' cried the girl, and she looked at the boy.

" 'God bless you, dear ! ' said he, and patted her cheeks."

This story delighted all the girls.

Then Godfather thought it would be nice for them to tell what they had last dreamt, and he

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would judge which of them had had the best dream.

"What! tell what they had dreamt!" cried they. "No, indeed!" And they all began to laugh and whisper. But gradually one girl after another began to declare that she had had such a wonderful dream the night before.

"Ah," said another, "but it couldn't have been so wonderful as mine was."

And at last all of them were anxious to be telling their dreams.

"But not aloud," they all stipulated; "only to some one person; and that person must certainly not be Godfather."

Arne was sitting silent on a knoll a little way off, and they decided they would trust their dreams to him. He was sitting in the shade of a hazel-bush when the girl who had told the first story came up to him. She considered for a while and then began:

"I dreamt I was standing by a great sheet of water. Then I saw some one moving over the water, and that was one whose name I will not say. He got up on the cup of a great water-lily, and there he sat, singing. Now I went

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and stood on one of the great lily-leaves that lie swimming on the water ; I wanted to row over to him on it. But as soon as I got on the leaf, it began to sink with me, and I was so frightened, that I burst out crying. Then he came rowing up in the lily-cup, took me into it, and away we rowed, right across the water. Wasn't that a beautiful dream ? ”

Next came the little girl who had told the tale about the little people.

“ I dreamed I had caught a little bird, and I was so glad. I didn't mean to let it go till I had got it home ; but when I got there, I didn't dare to let it go either, for fear father and mother might bid me let it out again. So I went up to the garret with it ; but there was the cat lurking about, so that I couldn't let it go there either. Then I didn't know what to do, so I went to the barn ; but, oh dear ! there were so many chinks, that it would easily have flown out through one. So I went away with it, down to the farm-yard again, and there (I thought) there was standing some one whose name I will not say. He stood playing with a big, big dog.

“ ‘I would rather play with your bird,’ said he, and he came quite near.

“ But now (I thought) I suddenly dashed away with him, the big dog after me, and away we went round the yard; but mother quickly opened the door, pulled me in, and shut it to again. Outside stood he, laughing, with his face against the window-pane.

“ ‘Look, here’s your bird!’ he cried. And fancy, he actually had it.

“ Wasn’t that a funny dream ? ”

Next came the girl who had told about all the thrushes. “ Eli,” the others called her. It was this Eli whom he had seen that evening in the boat, and mirrored in the lake. She was just the same as then, and yet not the same, so maidenly and handsome did she look now with her thoughtful face and slender figure, as she took her place. She was laughing very much, and it was long before she could manage to speak. At last she began :

“ I had been so enjoying the thought of coming here nutting to-day, that last night I dreamt I was sitting here on the hill. The sun was shining, and I had my lap all full of nuts,

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but a little squirrel had got in all among my nuts, and he sat up in my lap and ate them all. Wasn't that a funny dream?"

And now, when many dreams had been told him, he had to say which was the best. He wanted time to think, he said; so, meantime, Godfather, with all his troop, made his way to the homestead, whither Arne was to follow them. They darted down the hill, and arranged themselves in ranks when they had got on to level ground, and marched back to the house singing.

Arne, left sitting on the knoll, heard their singing. The sun's rays were falling on the merry band, and their white sleeves glistened in the distance. Sometimes one would take another round the waist; then away they danced over the meadow, with Godfather after, threatening them with his stick for treading down the grass. Arne was no longer thinking of the dreams, nor did his eyes long follow the young girls; his fancies were spreading over the dale like bright sun-threads, and he sat upon the hill-side, weaving them together. Before he was conscious of it, he was caught in a web of sad longings: there was a yearning in his heart to

be gone, such as never had been there in his life before. He vowed to tell his mother of his intent as soon he got home again, come of it what would.

These thoughts grew upon him every minute, and drove him to his old song, "Over the mountains high." Never had the words come so easily to him before, nor ranged themselves so fairly to his desire; they seemed to him like maidens sitting together on a hill. He drew forth a scrap of paper and wrote on it, on his knee. And when he had written his song through to the end, up he rose, as if freed from a burden. He had no wish to go back to the rest; he began to make his way homewards through the woods, though he knew he would need to be walking the whole night.

The first time he sat down to rest on the way, he thought he would take out the song, and sing it through to himself all through the parish; but he found he had left it, forgotten, on the spot where he made it.

One of the girls came to seek him at the knoll; she found—not him, but the song.

CHAPTER X

AT BÖEN

To "have a talk with mother" was a thing easier to say than to do. He alluded casually to Kristen, and the letters which never came ; but at that his mother left the room, and for days afterwards he thought her eyes were red. He perceived, too, another sign of her state of mind, and that was that she got especially nice meals for him.

One day he had to go to the forest, to cut down some wood ; his way ran through the thickets, and the spot where he was to begin his hewing was a place frequented in autumn-time for its wortleberries. Arne had put down his axe to take off his coat, and was just about to begin, when two girls came along with berry-pails. It was always his way to hide himself

rather than encounter a girl, so that was what he did now.

"O, I say! I say!" he heard, "just look at all the berries! Eli, Eli!"

"Yes, dear, yes—I see."

"But don't let's go any further; there are any number of pailfuls here."

"I thought I heard a rustle in the thicket there."

"Oh, you silly!" said the other; and each girl clasped the other nervously round the waist, and for a while they stood so still as scarcely to draw breath.

"Oh, it's nothing, after all," said one at length, "let's begin picking."

"Yes, yes, let's begin, then," said the other, and they began again to fill their pails.

"It *was* nice of you, Eli, to come over to the parsonage to-day. Now—haven't you something to tell me?"

"I've been at Godfather's——"

"Yes, yes, you told me that; but is there nothing about—you know whom?"

"Ah, yes!"

"Oh, Eli! really, really? Do be quick and tell me, dear."

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"He's been again!"

"What, really?"

"Yes, really. Both father and mother made as if they didn't notice anything, but I ran up to the garret and hid myself."

"Go on, go on. Did he follow you?"

"I think father must have told him where I was. He's always so horrid now."

"So he came after you, then? Here, sit down, sit down by me—now. He came up, you say?"

"Yes, but he didn't say much, he was so shy."

"Tell me every word he said, anyhow, every word."

"'Are you afraid of me?' said he. 'Why should I be afraid of you?' said I. 'You know what it is I want of you,' said he, and seated himself on the chest beside me."

"Beside you!"

"And then he put his arm round my waist——"

"Round your waist! are you mad?"

"I tried to get away again, but he wouldn't let me go. 'Dear Eli,' said he"—and she laughed, and the other girl laughed too.

"Well? well?—what then?"

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"Will you be my wife?" said he.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed her hearer.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Eli.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed they both.

"At last, however, even the girl's laughter could not but come to an end, and then for a while there was perfect silence, after which came a question in a low voice.

"But, Eli, tell me—wasn't it—wasn't it horrid, when he put his arm round you?"

The other either made no answer to this, or else it was in so low a tone that it could not be overheard; perhaps it was only a smile. Presently the first speaker began again.

"Didn't your father or your mother say anything to you about it afterwards?"

"Father came up and looked at me, but I hid myself directly, for he laughed as soon as he saw me."

"And your mother?"

"She said nothing, but she's not been so severe as usual."

"You refused him, I suppose?"

"Of course."

Then there was silence again for a time.

"I say?"

"Well?"

"Do you think any one will ever come to me like that?"

"Yes, of course."

"Are you really in earnest? O—O—Eli—suppose he were to take *me* by the waist!" And she hid her face.

Presently they were laughing, chattering, and whispering together, and before long they departed. They had neither of them seen Arne, or his axe or coat, of which he was very glad.

Some days after, he took Upland Knut to work and live at Kampen.

"You shall no longer be alone," said Arne.

Arne himself was now at work with a purpose. He had early learnt how to handle a saw, for he had done much to the house at Kampen. Now he wanted to practise carpentry as a trade, knowing it was best to have a regular handicraft, and he knew, too, that it was good for him to mix with other people; and such was the alteration that had gradually taken place in him, that he now felt himself longing for companionship whenever he had been for a while all

ARNE

alone. It happened that that winter he was at the parsonage, with his axe and saw, and both the girls were often together there too. Arne wondered, when he saw them, who on earth it was that was wooing Eli Bøen.

It happened one day that he was to take the pastor's daughter and Eli for a drive; he had sharp ears, but for all that, he could not hear what they were talking of. Now and again, Mathilde spoke a word to him, and then Eli would laugh, and turn away her face. Once Mathilde asked him if it was true that he wrote verses. "No," said he, shortly; and then both girls began to laugh, chatter, and giggle. After this, Arne was not best pleased with them, and behaved as if he did not see them.

Once he was sitting in the servants' room when there was dancing going on, and Mathilde and Eli had both come in to look on. They were evidently discussing something in the corner, something which Eli did not want, it seemed, but Mathilde did; and the latter had her way. So up they both came to where he sat, bowed, and asked if he could dance. He said he could not, and at this both turned, laughed, and fled.

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"That's a nice way to laugh," thought Arne, and he grew grave. But the pastor had a little foster-son, ten or twelve years old, whom Arne was very fond of; now from this boy Arne learned to dance, when no one else was by to see.

Eli had a little brother, the same age as the pastor's foster son. These two were playmates, and Arne made sledges, snow-shoes, and bird-snares for them, while he talked with them much of their sisters, especially of Eli. One day, Eli's brother brought him word that he was not to be so untidy and careless about his hair.

"Who said that?" he asked.

"Eli did; but I was not to tell that she said it."

Some days after, he sent word that Eli might laugh a little less. The boy came back again, with the message that Arne might laugh a little more.

One day, the boy wanted to have something he had written. Arne let him do so, and thought no more about it. A little while later, the boy tried to gladden Arne with the tidings that both the girls liked his writing very much.

"Have they seen seen it then?"

"Yes; it was for them that I wanted it."

Arne told the boys to bring him something that their sisters had written, and they did so. Arne corrected their writing with a carpenter's pencil, and bade the boys put it where it would be easy for them to find it. Later on, he found the paper in his jacket pocket again, and, written at the foot of it the words, "Corrected by a conceited goose."

Next day, Arne finished his work at the parsonage and went home. His mother had never found him so gentle as he was this winter, since that sorrowful time that followed his father's death. He read the sermon to her, he went to church with her, and was kind to her in every way. But she knew right well all the while that this was only to gain her consent to his leaving her, to travel, when spring came. Meanwhile, one day, a messenger came from Böen, to ask him if he would go over there for some carpentry work.

Arne was thrown into confusion, and answered "Yes," apparently without thinking the matter over. As soon as the man had gone, however, the mother said :

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"You may well be dumbfounded. From Böen!"

"Is that so wonderful, then?" asked Arne, without looking at her.

"From Böen!" cried Margit again.

"Well, why not, as well as from any other farm?" said he, looking up a bit.

"From Böen and Birgit Böen! from Baard, who maimed your father, and all for Birgit's sake!"

"What's that you say?" cried the boy. "Was it Baard Böen who did that?"

Son and mother stood looking at one another. A whole life-time swept before their eyes, and for an instant they saw the black thread that was woven through it from beginning to end. Presently they began to talk of the days of Nils's glory, when old Eli Böen herself sought him for her daughter Birgit, and got a refusal. They went on talking till they got to where Nils was struck down, and both found out that Baard's guilt in the matter had been the less; but nevertheless it was he and none other that had made Arne's father a cripple.

"Am I never to be finished with father?"

ARNE

thought Arne, and at once made up his mind to go.

When Arne walked across the ice to Bøen, his saw over his shoulder, it seemed to him a fine homestead. The house looked as if it had been new-painted all over: he was feeling cold, and perhaps that was why it looked so cosy and pleasant to him. Instead of going straight in, he went round by the farm-yard. There was a herd of shaggy-haired goats nibbling about in the snow at some birch boughs: a sheep-dog was running backwards and forwards in front of the barn, barking as if the fiend were coming into the yard; but as soon as Arne halted he began to wag his tail, and let himself be stroked. The kitchen door on the other side of the house opened every now and again, and each time Arne looked in, but saw only the milkmaid with her pails, or the cook throwing out something to the goats. From the barn came the sound of lusty threshing. On the left, by a pile of logs, stood a lad chopping up wood, and behind him were sundry wood-heaps.

Arne put down his saw, and went into the kitchen. The floor was all covered with white

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sand, and tiny shavings of juniper ; along the walls shone brightly-polished copper cooking utensils, and in the racks were rows of china. Dinner was being cooked. Arne asked if he could speak to Baard. "Go into the parlour," answered a maid, pointing. He went. He noticed that there was no latch to the door, but a handle of brass instead. The room was clean and well-painted, the ceiling ornamented with roses ; the presses coloured red, with their owner's name in black letters, and the bedstead to match, but with the addition of blue stripes round the edges. By the fireplace sat a broad-shouldered man, with a kind face and long yellow hair ; he was fitting hoops on some tubs. At the end of the long table sat a woman with a linen hood on her head ; she wore closely-fitting clothes, and was tall and slender ; she was busy dividing a heap of grain into two portions. These were the only people in the room.

"Good day, and good luck to your work !" said Arne, taking off his cap.

Both looked up. The man smiled, and asked who he was.

"The man about the carpentry."

ARNE

The man smiled still more, nodding his head and beginning his work again. "Ah! Arne Kampen."

"Arne Kampen?" cried the woman, her eyes fixed on him. The man looked up quickly, with another smile. "Son of Nils Skrædder," he said, and settled down to his work again.

Next minute the woman had risen, gone to a shelf, turned round, moved back to a cupboard, turned back again, bending down as if groping for something in a drawer, and asked, without looking up:

"Is he to work here?"

"Yes, he is," said the man, without looking up either. "You haven't been asked to take a seat, I'm afraid," he went on, turning to Arne.

Arne sat down by the door. The woman left the room, the man went on with his work. Arne asked if he might begin work too. "We'll have dinner first," was the answer.

The woman did not return, but next time the kitchen door opened it was Eli who came in. At first she made as if she did not see him. He got up to meet her, and she turned half round as she gave him her hand, without letting her eyes

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meet his. They exchanged a few words, while the father went on working. Eli's hair was in plaits now ; she wore a bodice with tight-fitting sleeves, her figure was slender and graceful, her wrists prettily curved, and her hands small.

She began to lay the table. The work-folk took their dinner in the other room, but Arne and the household had theirs in the parlour. It happened that particular day that they dined alone, but generally they all sat at the same table in the big light kitchen.

"Isn't your mother coming?" asked the man.

"No; she is in the garret, weighing out wool."

"Have you asked her?"

"Yes; but she says she doesn't want anything to eat."

For a moment there was silence, and then the man said:

"It must be cold up in the garret."

"She wouldn't let me light the fire," answered Eli.

After dinner Arne began his work; in the evening he sat with the others again. The mother was with them too; she and her daughter

were sewing, the man was employed in mending various little things, and Arne helped. For a long time there was perfect stillness, for Eli, whose wont it seemed to be to lead the talk, was now quite silent. It struck Arne, with a sort of dread, that it was often so in his own home ; but now, for the first time, it seemed to him oppressive. At last Eli drew a deep breath, as if she had held it long enough, and began to laugh. Then the father began to laugh too, and Arne, somehow, felt in a laughing mood, and joined in as well. Then they began to talk of all sorts of things. By degrees he and Eli had most of the conversation to themselves, the father putting in a word here and there. But once, after Arne had been speaking at some length, he chanced to look up ; his eye met Birgit's—the mother's—eyes ; she had let fall her work, and sat gazing fixedly at him. She plied her needle again at once, but as soon as he began to speak again she looked up.

Bed-time came, and they all went to their rooms. Arne particularly wanted to note what dream he would have the first night in a new place ; but there was no sense in it at all. The

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whole day he had talked very little, or not at all, with the master of the house; yet all night it was only of him that he dreamt. Just before waking, it seemed to him that Baard was sitting at cards with Nils Skrædder, who was very angry and pale; but Baard was smiling, and drawing all the cards over to his side.

Arne was there for several days, during which there was almost nothing said, but a great deal done. Not only the family in the parlour, but the servants, the labourers, and even the maids scarcely spoke. There was an old dog in the yard, who barked whenever a stranger approached; but no one in the place ever heard the dog baying without a prompt "Lie down, sir!" at which the old hound returned, grumbling, to his kennel. At Kampen there was a great weathercock on the roof, that turned with every breath of wind; here at Böen was a still larger one, which attracted Arne's attention at once, because it never moved. When the wind drove against it, it tried with all its might to get free, and Arne watched it so long that at last he could not keep himself from getting up on the roof and loosening it.

It was not frozen tight, as he had thought, but a peg was run through it to keep it from turning. Arne drew it out and threw it down; it struck Baard, who happened to be passing. He looked up, with a "What are you doing there?"

"Loosening the weathercock."

"Don't do that; it squeaks when it turns."

"That's better," said Arne, as he sat astride the ridge of the roof—"that's better than making no sound at all."

Baard looked up at Arne, and Arne looked down at Baard; then Baard smiled.

"He that can't help squeaking when he speaks," he said, "had best hold his tongue altogether, I should think."

Now it may happen that a remark haunts you long after it has been made, and especially when it is the last you have heard. These words repeated themselves to Arne as he climbed down in the cold from the roof, and they were with him still when he came into the parlour that evening. Eli was standing by the window in the evening twilight, looking out over the ice that lay shining in the rays of the moon. He

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went to the other window, and looked out too. Inside, all was comfortable warmth and stillness ; outside, all was cold. The keen night wind, sweeping through the valley, was shaking the trees, so that the shadows they cast in the moon-shine scrambled and crept hither and thither across the snow. From the parsonage on the other side shone out a bright light, that seemed to keep dilating and contracting, and to take all sorts of shapes and tints, as is ever the case when one looks over-long at a bright thing. The mountain towered aloft, black and haunted of strange shapes within, but white with the moon-light falling on its snows without. The heavens were thick-sown with stars, a northern light at the far-off boundary just glimmering into view but not spreading. A few paces from the window, by the water's edge, stood the trees, their shadows melting into one another ; but the great ash stood alone and apart, drawing figures on the snow.

All was still, save that every now and then came the sound of a strident, wailing noise. "What is that ?" asked Arne.

"The weathercock," answered Eli, adding, in

a lower tone, as if to herself, "it must have broken loose."

Till then, Arne had been as one who would have talked, but could not. Now he spoke.

"Do you remember the tale of the thrushes and their singing?"

"Yes."

"Of course; why, it was you who told it us. It was a beautiful story."

"I often think," she said, in so soft a voice as he had never yet heard, he thought—"I often think there is something singing when one is quite still."

"That is the good in one's heart," said he.

She looked at him as if there was too much in that answer, and both were silent for awhile.

Drawing on the pane with her finger, she asked him:

"Have you been making any new songs lately?"

He coloured up, but she could not see that, so she went on questioning.

"How do you set about making a song?"

"Do you really care to know?"

"Yes—yes."

AT BÖEN

"I keep hold and take care of thoughts that other people are glad to let go," he answered evasively, and she was silent again for awhile ; for she was trying with one and another of his songs, if she, too, had had the thoughts, but let them go.

"That is very wonderful," she said, as if to herself, and began to draw on the window-pane anew.

"I made a song the first time I saw you," said Arne.

"Where was that ?"

"Down by the parsonage over there, that night you left them. I saw you in the water."

She laughed, stopped, and said :

"Let me hear the song."

Arne had never before done such a thing, yet now he trusted himself to sing the song to her.

"Fair Venevil hastened, with light-tripping feet,
Her lover to greet," etc.

Eli listened with great attention, and stood still for some minutes after the song was ended. Then at last she cried :

"Oh, how I pity poor Venevil !"

"It always seems to me as if I hadn't written

it myself," said Arne. He was feeling ashamed now of having sung his own verses to her; he could not make out how it was he had come to do it. He stood there now, thinking of the words. Then said Eli:

"But is that what's to happen to me, then?"

"No, no, no; I was really thinking of myself."

"Is it to happen to you, then?"

"I don't know; but I felt so at that time. I feel so no longer; I used to be so melancholy at that time."

"That is strange," said she; and her fingers were busy on the window again.

Next morning, when Arne came in to dinner, he went straight to the window. Out of doors, the world was grey and heavy; within, warmth and comfort. On the window was written by a finger, "Arne," "Arne," "Arne" — always "Arne." It was the window by which Eli had been standing the night before.

But next day Eli did not come downstairs; she was poorly. Indeed, she had been by no means well of late; she said so herself, and besides, it was plain to see.

CHAPTER XI

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

NEXT day Arne came in and mentioned what he had just heard on the farm—that Mathilde, the pastor's daughter, was on the point of setting out on a visit to town; for some days, she herself thought, but, in reality, for a year or two. Eli, who had heard nothing of it till that moment, fainted away.

Arne had never seen such a thing before, and was very frightened. He ran for the servants, and they for her parents, who came breathless to the room. There was a confusion of noises all over the farm, the watch-dog by the barn door joining in with his deep bark. When Arne came in again somewhat later, he found the mother was on her knees by the bed, and the father was supporting his sick daughter's head. The maids were scurrying to and fro;

one was running for water, another for the cordial drops that were in one of the cupboards, and a third was loosening the girl's bodice round her neck.

"Ah! God save and help us!" said the mother; "it was too idiotic of us to have told her nothing about it. It was all your doing Baard. God save and help you!"

Baard made no reply.

"I told you so before," she went on; "but nothing's ever done as I want it here. Ah! God help you! you're always so hard about her, Baard. You don't understand her at all. You don't know what it means to love any one, you don't."

Still Baard was silent.

"She's not like others, that can bear sorrow, isn't Eli; it knocks her over completely, poor weak little thing! especially now, too, when she's so out of sorts. Wake up again, my dear little one, and we'll always be kind to you! Wake up again, my own Eli, and don't grieve us so!"

Then said Baard:

"You either keep silence too much, or else

you talk too much ;” and he looked at Arne, as if he wished him not to listen, but to go about his work. But as the maids stayed there, Arne thought he too might stay, so he only walked across to the window. The sick girl had now so far recovered as to be able to open her eyes and see those about her ; but at the same instant recollection returned, and with a cry of “ Mathilde ! Mathilde ! ” she fell into a fit of weeping, and sobbed so that it was pain for one to be in the room. Her mother sought to comfort her, while her father stood just so as to be seen by her ; but the poor girl pushed them both away.

“ Go, go ! ” she cried. “ Go ! I can’t bear you, either of you ! ”

“ Christ Jesus ! ” said the mother, “ you can’t bear your own parents ? ”

“ No ! you’re cruel to me ; and you take from me the only joy I have ! ”

“ Eli, Eli ! don’t say such awful things,” said her mother, sternly.

“ Yes, mother, yes ! ” screamed the girl, hysterically ; “ now I must speak. Yes, mother ! you want to marry me to that horrid man ; and

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poor girl, sobbing like a little child, so that to Arne it seemed as if he had never heard the sound of weeping before.

"But you couldn't see her," said Baard.

"I could see the house," she retorted. And her mother interrupted vehemently, looking at him, "You can't understand anything of that, you!" So Baard said no more.

"Now I can never go to the window!" said Eli. "I used to go to it every morning when I got up; in the evening I sat there in the moonlight; and I went there always when I had no one to go to. Oh Mathilde! Mathilde!"

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

She writhed on her bed, and began to sob convulsively again. Baard sat down on a stool and gazed steadfastly at her.

Eli was not herself again so soon as they had perhaps expected. Towards evening they began to suspect that some illness was upon her that had probably been coming on for some time past; and Arne was called in to help to take her up to her own room. She was quite unconscious, pallid, and motionless. Her mother sat down beside her; her father stood by the bed, looking at her; presently he rose and went down to his work. Arne did the same; but that evening he prayed for her, and he prayed that one so young and pretty as she might live happy in this world, with no one to take her happiness from her.

Next day, when Arne came in, the father and mother were sitting together, talking: the mother had plainly been weeping. Arne asked how Eli was going on; each expected the other to speak, so that it was a moment or two before he was answered. "Very sadly indeed," said the father, at last; and later on Arne heard that Eli had been wandering in her mind all night, or, as the

father put it, "saying all sorts of queer things." Now she lay in a torpid state, recognising no one, and refusing to touch food. They had just been debating whether to call a doctor or not. When they rose to go to the patient's room, and Arne was left sitting by himself, it seemed to him as if life and death were struggling in the room above; but he must sit alone, apart from them.

In a few days, however, she was better. Once, as the father sat by her, a fancy took her to have Narrifas—the bird Mathilde had given her—by the bed. Then Baard told her what was too true—that, in all the confusion and worry of her illness, the bird had been forgotten, and was dead. The mother happened to come in just as he was speaking.

"Oh, God help me, Baard!" she cried from the doorway, "you cruel creature, to tell your sick girl such a thing as that. Look, she's fainting away again! Look! God forgive you your heartlessness!"

Each time Eli came to at all she cried for her bird; declared passionately she could never be happy with Mathilde again, now that Narrifas

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was dead ; begged to be allowed to go to her, and fell into a swoon again. Baard stood by looking at her till it was too hard to bear ; then he tried to help soothe her, but Birgit pushed him aside, telling him to let the poor child alone. So Baard stood and looked at both for a long while, then he straightened his hat on his head with both hands, turned, and left the room.

The pastor and his wife came over later on, for her illness gained fresh hold upon her now, and they knew not whether the end of it would be life or death.

Both the pastor and his wife gave Baard a bit of their minds, telling him he was too hard in his treatment of his child. They got to hear about the bird, and the pastor told him plainly that his conduct had been horribly unfeeling. He would like, he said, to take the girl back to their house as soon as she was better and able to be moved. The pastor's wife, indeed, refused to see him any longer ; she wept, and sat by Eli's bedside, fetched the doctor, received his directions, and came over to Bøen several times a day to see that they were carried out. Baard wandered about the farm from one place to

another, nearly always quite alone ; often standing still for a long while, and then, straightening his hat on his head with both hands, falling to some work or other.

The mother no longer spoke with him : they scarcely looked at one another. He went up to the sick girl several times a day, taking off his shoes at the foot of the stairs and laying down his hat outside the door before warily opening it. As soon as he came in, Birgit turned as if she had not seen him, then leant her head on her hand again, and looked straight before her at the patient, who lay there pale and motionless, unaware of anything that was going on around her. Baard generally stood for a moment or two at the foot of the bed, looked at both of them, and saying nothing. Whenever Eli moved, as if about to wake, he glided away from the spot as silently as he had entered.

Often Arne thought that now had been said certain things between man and wife, as also between parents and child, which long had been stored up in secret among them, and would not now be soon put out of mind again. He longed to be gone, though he was all eagerness to know

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

first how it was to turn out with Eli. But that he could always keep himself informed of, after all, thought he ; so he went to Baard and said that it was time for him to go home again : the work he had come for was done. Baard was sitting on the timber-chopping block in the yard when Arne came to him and told him ; he was bending forward, digging in the snow with a wooden peg. Arne recognised the peg : it was the same that had held tight the weathercock. Baard did not look up as he answered, " It's not pleasant, I know, to be here now ; but still, I shouldn't like you to go." And he said no more, and neither did Arne. He waited a moment, then went and got something to do, as if it was settled that he was to remain.

Later in the day, when Arne was called in to dinner, he found Baard still sitting on the wood-block. Then Arne went up to him, and asked how Eli was that day.

" Bad, bad, I'm sure, to-day," answered Baard, " I see her mother's been weeping."

It seemed to Arne as if some one had invited him to sit down, and he placed himself on a bit of a felled tree, exactly opposite Baard.

"I've been thinking a good deal about your father the last few days," said Baard, so unexpectedly that Arne could make no reply. "You know, of course," he went on, "what there was between us?"

"I know."

"Ah, but you only know one side of the matter, of course, and so you lay all the blame on me."

"You have surely made your account for it," said Arne, after a moment's hesitation, "with your God, just as certainly as my father has now done."

"Ah, well! that must be as it may," answered Baard. "When I found this peg though, it seemed so strange that you, of all men, should have come here and loosed the weathercock. But it's just as well, first as last, thought I." He had taken off his hat, and now he sat there looking at it.

Arne did not yet perceive that Baard meant that he wanted to talk to him of his father now; nay, he did not even realise it when he began on the subject, for it seemed so unlike Baard. But now he gradually remarked, during the pro-

gress of Baard's talk what had been going on in his heart; and if he had felt any respect before for this ponderous but thoroughly worthy man, be sure it was none the less after that.

"I was about fourteen," said Baard; and he paused here, as he did every now and then throughout his whole narrative. Then he said a few more words and paused again, so that every word of his story gave one the impression of being well weighed: "I was about fourteen when I first got to know your father, who was about the same age. . . . He was very spirited, and would own no one over him, and that was why he never could forget that I was number one at confirmation, and he was number two. . . . He often challenged me to settle which was best man, but somehow it never came to anything; most likely because neither of us was quite confident of winning. . . . But it's a funny thing, that he had quarrels and fights every day, and nothing came of it, while the one time I was drawn in it turned out as badly as it could; but it's true I had waited a long time. . . . Nils ran after all the girls, and they after him. There was only one I cared about, but

her he took from me at every dance, every wedding, every party ; it was she to whom now I am married. . . . Often, as I sat by, I longed to try my strength with him, just for that ; but I was afraid that I might lose, and I knew that then I should lose her too. When all the people had gone away, I used to lift the weights he had lifted, and take the leaps he had leapt ; but all the same, next time that he danced off with the girl before my eyes, I could not bring myself to set everything on a throw with him ; though once, as he stood fooling with her before my face, I took a full-grown man and laid him across the beam above, as if just for fun. That made Nils turn a bit pale. . . .

“ But if he had only behaved well to her ! But he was deceiving her, and that night after night. I really believe she liked him the better for it each time. . . . So it came about that the end drew near. I would not have him going on like that any longer, and it was thus that he fell a bit heavier than I meant him to. . . . I never saw him again.”

They sat a long while silent. At length Baard went on :

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"I began to court her again. She gave me neither yea nor nay, but I thought we should get on better together by-and-by. We got married; our wedding took place down in the valley there, at her aunt's, who made her her heiress. We began with much, and that's since grown to more. Our farms had lain side by side, and now they were thrown into one—a thing I had longed to have done ever since my boyhood. . . . But many other things were not as I had longed to have them." He broke off, and sat silent awhile. Arne thought for a moment that he was weeping, but that was not so; yet his voice was gentler than usual when he went on: "At first she was very quiet and melancholy. I had nothing to say to console her, so I was silent too. A bit later on she began gradually to take up with those bustling, domineering ways you've no doubt noticed. At any rate, that's some alteration, thought I; so I said nothing now either. . . . But one day of real happiness I've not had since I was married, and that I've been twenty years now." . . .

At this, he broke the wooden peg in two, and sat looking at the pieces awhile.

“When Eli began to grow up, I thought it would be happier for her to be with strangers than with us. It’s not often I’ve wanted my way in anything, but when I have it’s mostly turned out all wrong—as it did in this instance. The mother sat longing for her child, though there was only that bit of water between them; and at last, too, I began to suspect that it wasn’t the best place in the world for her to be, for the parsonage people are a set of most kind-hearted noodles; but I was too late with my wisdom. She cares now for neither father nor mother.”

He had taken off his hat again, and his long hair was hanging down over his eyes. He pushed it aside, and set on his hat with both hands, as if to go; but, turning towards the house to rise, he paused again, and added, looking up at the attic window:

“I thought it would be better for Mathilde and her not to say farewell to one another; but that was foolish too. I told her the poor little bird was dead, because that was my fault, so it seemed to me I ought to tell her; but I was wrong there too. And so it is in everything; all I have done was always meant for the best, but it’s always

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turned out for the worst, and now it's come so far that they're both speaking ill of me—wife and daughter; and here am I, wandering about alone."

A maid called to them that the meat was getting cold. Baard got up. "I hear the horses whinnying," said he; "they have been forgotten, I expect;" and he went off to the stables to give them some hay.

CHAPTER XII

ARNE'S SONG

ELI was very weak after her relapse. Her mother sat over her day and night, and was never to be seen downstairs; her father went up to pay his accustomed visits in his stocking-feet, always leaving his hat outside the door. Arne was still at the farm; he and Baard sat together in the evenings, and he had grown very fond of him. Baard was a well-informed and very thoughtful man, but inclined to be somewhat afraid of what he knew; but now, when Arne encouraged, and told him of things that he did not know before, Baard was very grateful.

Eli was soon able to sit up at times; and after each attempt, as she got on better, she grew more and more full of whims. Thus it happened that one evening, as Arne sat in the room below hers, singing aloud, the mother came down and

ARNE'S SONG

asked him, in Eli's name, to go up to her and sing, so that she could hear the words. Arne must surely have been sitting there singing for Eli as it was, for when Birgit spoke he turned red, and got up as if to deny that he had done so, though no one had said he had. However, he pulled himself up and said—trying to refuse—that he was scarcely able to sing at all. But he was answered by the mother that that did not seem to be so when he sat alone.

Arne gave in and went. He had not seen Eli since the day he helped to carry her up; he felt that she must now be much changed, and that gave him a feeling of dread. But when he softly opened the door, and entered, there was such deep darkness that he saw no one. He paused by the door.

"Who is that?" asked Eli, in a clear, low tone.

"Arne Kampen," answered he, gently, trying to keep his voice from jarring on her nerves.

"It was good of you to come."

"How are you now, Eli?"

"Thanks; now I am getting better."

You must sit down, Arne," she said, after a

pause ; and Arne felt his way to a chair that stood by the foot of the bed. "It was so nice to hear you singing, that you must sing a little to me up here."

"If I only knew what to sing !"

There was silence for a moment, and then, "Sing a hymn," said the girl. And he did so, singing a bit of a confirmation hymn. As he finished, he heard her weeping, and did not dare to sing any more ; but presently she said, "Sing another," and he sang one that is often heard in church.

"How many things I have thought of while I've been lying here !" said Eli, when he had finished.

He knew not what to answer, and he heard her weeping again to herself in the darkness. A clock, which was ticking away on the wall, gathered itself up for a blow, and struck out the hour.

Eli slowly drew breath once or twice, as if trying to lighten a load on her breast, and said :

"One knows so little ; one can't even get to know one's own father or mother. I have not

ARNE'S SONG

been good to them, and that's why it makes me feel so strange now to hear the confirmation hymn."

When people talk in the dark, they are likely to be more truthful than when they see one another's faces, and to speak more freely too.

"It makes me happy to hear you say that," answered Arne. He was thinking of what she had said when she fell ill.

She understood what was in his heart, and added :

"Had not that happened to me, God knows how long I might have been without having found mother."

"Has she spoken freely with you, then?"

"Every day ; she has done nothing else."

"Then you must have heard much from her?"

"You may well say so."

". . . . She talked to you about my father, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Does she still think of him?"

"She still thinks of him."

"He did not treat her well."

"Poor mother!"

ARNE

"He treated himself far worse, though."

But there was something in the heart of each that neither would tell the other. It was Eli who first spoke again :

"You are said to be like your father."

"They say so," he answered, uneasily.

She did not notice his tone, so she returned to the subject again.

"Could he, too, make songs ? "

"No."

"Sing me a song—one that you have made yourself."

But it was not Arne's habit to admit that any song he sang was his own.

"I have none," he said.

"But you will find one, and you'll sing it, too, won't you, if I ask? "

And he did for her now what he never had done for any one else. This was the song he sang :

"Green stood the Tree, with its leaves tender-bright.

' Shall I take them ? ' said Frost, as he breathed through the night.

' Oh ! pray let them be

Till my blossoms you see ! '

Begged the Tree, as she shivered and shook in affright.

ARNE'S SONG

" Sweet sang the birds the fair blossoms among.
' Shall I take them ? ' said Wind, as he swayed them and
 swung,
 ' Oh ! pray let them be,
 Till my berries you see ! '
Begged the Tree, as its branches all quivering hung.

" Bright grew the berries beneath the sun's heat.
' Shall I take them ? ' said Lassie, so young and so sweet.
 ' Ah ! take them, I crave,
 Take all that I have ! '
Begged the Tree, as it bent its full boughs to her feet."

The song seemed well nigh to take her breath away. He, too, sat there when it was ended, as if he had said more in his song than he had wanted.

Darkness lies heavy upon those who sit together in it, but do not talk ; they are never nearer together than then. He heard it if she but turned, or merely drew her hand across the coverlet ; he heard her, if she so much as breathed a little deeper than usual.

" Arne, couldn't you teach me to make songs ? "

" Have you never tried ? "

" Yes, lately, but I can't get on."

" What have you tried to make your songs about ? "

ARNE

"About mother, and all her love for your father."

"That's a difficult subject."

"I've cried over it so, too."

"You must not seek for subjects ; they come."

"How do they come ?"

"Like other precious things—when one least expects them."

Both were silent awhile.

"I wonder, Arne," she said, at length, "that you, who have so much that is beautiful within yourself, should want to go away."

"How do you know I want to ?"

She did not answer, but lay silent as if in thought.

"Arne, you must not go away !" she said, and it set his blood aflame.

"There are times when I seem not to want to so much," he said.

"Your mother must be very fond of you. I must get to know your mother."

"Come over to Kampen when you're well again," said he. And at the words he seemed to see her sitting in the bright room at Kampen, looking out at the mountains. His heart began

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to beat fast, and his blood to rush to his head. "It's very warm in here," said he, and he rose, as if to go.

She heard his movement.

"Are you going, Arne?" said she, and he sat down again. "You must come here oftener now. Mother's taken such a liking to you."

"I should like to come, too . . . but I must have something to come for."

Eli was silent for a while as if she were reflecting.

"I think," she said, "mother has something she will ask you about."

He heard her raising herself up in bed. No sound was there in the room or below, save the clock ticking on the wall. Suddenly she broke out:

"Would to God summer were here!"

"Summer!"—and at the word rose up before him fragrant leaves, and the tinkle of cattle-bells, merry sounds from the hills, and songs from the valleys, the black water glittering in the sun, and the homesteads reflected in its ripples. Eli came out, and was sitting down just as she had done that summer evening long ago.

ARNE

"If summer were here," said she, "if I could sit on the hill, I certainly believe I should be able to sing a song of my own."

He laughed, and asked, "What would it be about?"

"About something that would be easy enough—about—about—I don't know!"

"Tell me, Eli!" and he rose joyously; but a thought struck him, and he sat down again.

"Not you, for all the world!" And she laughed.

"I sang to you when you asked me."

"That's true—but no, no, no!"

"Eli, do you think I'd make fun of the little verses you've made?"

"No, that I don't Arne; but it's not anything I've made myself."

"Is it anybody else's, then?"

"Yes; it came of itself to me, so to speak."

"Well, then, surely you can tell it me."

"No, no; it's not anything of that sort either, Arne. Don't ask me any more."

She was certainly hiding her head in the bed, for the last words were scarcely audible.

"Well, Eli, you're not as kind to me as I've been to you!" and he rose.

ARNE'S SONG

"Arne, it's different—you don't understand me—but it was—I don't know—some other time—don't be cross with me, Arne! Don't go away!" And she began to cry.

"Eli, what is the matter with you?" and he listened. "Are you ill?" he asked, but he did not think she was.

She was still weeping, and he felt that now he must move—either forward or back.

"Eli!"

"Yes!"—both voices in a whisper.

"Give me your hand."

She made no answer. He listened, quickly, closely—stretched out his own hand over the coverlet, and grasped a warm little hand that lay bare.

There was a step on the stairs, and they let go of one another.

It was Birgit, coming in with a light. "You've been sitting too long in the dark," said she, and put the candle on the table. But neither Eli nor he could bear the light; she turned her face to the pillow, and he held his hand before his eyes. "Ah, yes; it's a bit dazzling at first," said the mother; "but the feeling soon passes away."

ARNE

Arne groped about on the floor for his hat—which he had never brought in with him—and so left the room.

Next day he heard that Eli was going to come down for awhile after dinner. He put his tools together, and bade farewell to the farm. When she came down he was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

MARGIT'S CONFESSION

SPRING comes late among the mountains. The post that speeds along the highway three times a week in winter comes only once in April, and the mountain-dwellers begin to feel that now the snow has begun to melt in the world without, the ice is breaking, the steamers are travelling to and fro again, and the harrow is breaking the soil once more. With them, the snow still lies three ells high, the cattle are still lowing from their stalls, and the birds that come back hide themselves shivering. The chance traveller tells them that he has left his carriage down in the valley below, and shows them flowers that he has plucked by the roadside. Then the mountaineers begin to be filled with longings as they go about talking to one another, looking at the sun, and discussing how much higher in the sky

ARNE

it gets daily. They strew ashes on the slippery snow, and their thoughts wander to those who now are plucking flowers.

At such a season was it that old Margit Kampen came up to the parsonage, and asked to be allowed to speak to the pastor. She was taken into his study, where the minister, a slimly built, fair-haired, kind-looking man, with large eyes shadowed by spectacles, received her friendlily (for he knew her), and bade her sit down.

"Anything fresh about Arne?" he asked, as if they had often spoken together on that subject.

"Ah, God help me!" said Margit; "there's never anything but good that I have to say of him; and yet it's so hard." And she looked very sad as she spoke.

"Has his old longing come back again?" asked the pastor.

"Worse than ever," said the mother. "I don't believe that he'll stay with me now even ill spring's here."

"But he promised never to leave you."

"That he did. But, good Lord! he must act

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for himself now. If his mind's set on it, he can't well help himself. But what's to become of me ? ”

“ All the same, I don't really believe he'll ever forsake you,” said the pastor.

“ No ; but suppose he can't be happy at home ? Dare I have it on my conscience that I'm in his way ? There are times when I think I ought to beg him to go.”

“ How do you know that he wants to go now more than before ? ”

“ Ah ! by many things. Since the middle of winter he hasn't worked anywhere in the parish for a single day. On the other hand, he's made three trips to the town, and each time been a long while there. He scarcely ever speaks now at his work, though that's often been his habit. He sits for a long, long while by himself in the little garret window, looking out towards the mountains and the ravine. He sits there all Sunday afternoons ; and often, when there's moonlight, he'll sit there till far past midnight.”

“ Does he never read aloud to you ? ”

“ Every Sunday, as usual, of course, he reads and sings to me ; but he seems to hurry over it,

except now and again, when he makes almost too much of it."

"Does he ever talk to you?"

"Often not for so long at a time that I can't help crying to myself; then he notices that, and begins to talk; but only of little things, never of serious ones."

The pastor paced up and down, paused, and asked:

"Why don't *you* talk to him of them, then?"

It was long before she answered. She gave two or three sighs; she looked on the ground and aside; she folded her kerchief and unfolded it.

"I've come here to-day," she said, at last, "to talk with you, sir, about something that's heavy on my heart."

"Speak freely; that will lighten it."

"I trust it will; for I have now crept under the burden for many and many a year, and each year it grows heavier and heavier."

"What is it then my poor woman?"

There was still some hesitation before she spoke.

"I have committed a great sin against my son," and she began to weep.

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The pastor went up close to her. "Confess it to me, then, and let us pray God together to forgive it you."

Margit sobbed, and dried her tears, and began to weep again as soon as she tried to speak, and thus she went on for some time. The pastor endeavoured to comfort her. "It certainly couldn't be such a dreadful thing that she had done," he said; "she was too severe to herself," and so forth. But Margit went on weeping, and could not make a beginning of her story till the pastor sat down by her side and began to question her kindly. Then it came out, bit by bit. "He had such a hard time," she said, "when he was a boy, and that made him long to travel. Well, he met Kristen—that Kristen who's now such a great man out there where they dig up gold; and Kristen gave Arne so many books that he was no longer the same as we peasant folk. The two sat together night after night, and when Kristen went off, Arne wanted to go too. But at that time," she went on, "his father died so terribly, and my boy promised never to leave me. But I was like a hen that had hatched a duck's egg. When

ARNE

the little one grew up a bit, he wanted to go out on the great water, and I went about everywhere crying. If he didn't actually go himself, his songs were always of travel, so that I expected every morning to find his bed empty.

"Then it was that there came for him a letter from a long, long way off; and this must be (I knew) from Kristen. God forgive me! I took and hid it. I thought that was the end of it; but presently came another, and, as I had hidden the first, I had to do the same with this one too. But it was as if they were burning a hole in the box where I put them, for I could think of nothing but that from the moment I opened my eyes to the time I went to bed. And, just imagine what was worst of all—there came a third letter! I stood with it in my hand for a quarter of an hour; I carried it about with me in my dress for three days, weighing with myself whether to give it to him or put it away with the other two; but, perhaps (thought I) it might have the power to entice away my boy from me, and so I could not help putting it with the rest. Now I went in fear the whole day long; not only because of those in the box, but also of

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anything new coming. I was afraid of every person who came near the farm; and when we were both indoors and there came a rap, I trembled all over; it might be a letter, and then he would take it in himself. When he was away in the village, I kept pacing about the farm, thinking, 'Now perhaps he's been given a letter out there, and has found out from it about the others that have come!' When he came back, I looked at his face as he was still far off, and if he smiled—good God! how glad I was, for by that I knew he had heard nothing! He had grown so handsome now, too — just like his father, but fairer and gentler. And then he had such a beautiful voice for singing! When he sat on the threshold in the evening, singing up at the mountains above, and listening for the echo, then I knew that I could never bear to lose him! If I only saw him, if I only knew that he was anywhere near, if he merely seemed happy, and gave me a nod now and again, then I felt there was nothing more I wanted here on earth, and I would not have had any of my tears unwept.

"But just as it seemed he was getting

happier, and to like being among people more than he used to, there came a message one day from the post-office that now a fourth letter had come, and in it two hundred dollars! I thought I should have sunk to the ground as I stood there; what *was* I to do now? This letter, of course, I could put out of the way as before—but the money? I got no sleep for many a night for that money. I put it at one time in the garret, at one time in the cellar behind a cask, and once I was so desperate that I put it in the window, for him to find; but when I heard him coming, I took it away again. At last I hit on a plan; I gave him the money, and told him it was some that had been owing since my mother's death. He buried it in the ground—a thing I had myself thought of; and there it rested. But as luck would have it, that very autumn, as he sat there one evening, he kept saying he wondered that Kristen should have forgotten him so completely.

“That made my wound break out again, and the money burnt; it was sin that I had done, and sin to no purpose!

“The mother who has sinned against her

MARGIT'S CONFESSION

child is the unhappiest of all mothers ; and yet I had only done it from love of him. So it is that I am surely to be punished by losing my dearest. Ever since midwinter now, he's been singing the tune he always sings when the longing to go seizes upon him ; 'tis the song he has sung from his boyhood, and I never hear it without turning pale. It's then that I feel I could do anything. And here you shall see," she said, drawing forth a paper from her bodice, unfolding it, and giving it to the pastor ; "here is something he writes at, every now and again ; it is words that go to that tune. I brought it with me, because I can't read such fine writing. Will you please see if there's anything in it about going away ? "

There was only one complete verse on the paper. Here and there was a line, or half a line, of another stanza, as if it were a song that he had forgotten, and was now trying to recollect line by line. And this was how the first verse ran :

" Fain would I know what the world may be
Over the mountains high.
Mine eyes can nought but the white snow see,
And up the steep sides the dark fir-tree,
That climbs as if yearning to know.
Ah ! what if one ventured to go ? "

ARNE

"Is it about travelling?" asked Margit, hungrily watching the pastor's face.

"Yes, it is about travelling," said he, and let the paper fall.

"I knew it! Oh God! I knew it all the time, well enough!"

She looked at the pastor with clasped hands, her face haggard, her eyes wild with excitement, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

But here the pastor could no more help her than she could herself. "The lad must be left alone," said he; "life can't be made different for his sake; but maybe he'll come to see something more in it of his own accord. Just now it looks as if he thought he might get that 'something more' by wandering in search of it."

"Why, that's just like the old woman!" said Margit.

"The old woman?"

"The old woman who wandered on and on to get sunlight, instead of making a window in the wall to let it come in!"

The pastor was struck by her acuteness; but, indeed, it was not the first time he had been astonished, when she got on the subject of Arne's

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longings: truth to tell, Margit had given her thoughts to nothing else these seven or eight years past.

"Do you think he'll go? what am I to do? and the money? and the letters?" she cried, her thoughts all crowding in upon her.

"As to the letters, your conduct has been wrong. You'll find it difficult to answer for having kept from him what was his. Worse still, you have let a fellow-Christian—and one who by no means deserved it—appear in a contemptible light to your son, and, what makes it worst of all, one of whom he was so fond, and who in turn was so much attached to him. But we will pray to God to forgive you; we will both pray to Him."

Margit bowed her head; she had been sitting all along with her hands folded. "How gladly," she said, "would I pray for forgiveness, if only I knew he would stay!"

She was evidently mixing up God and Arne in her mind. The pastor made as if he did not hear her.

"Do you mean now," he asked, "to tell him the truth straight away?"

She fixed her eyes on the ground, and said, in a low tone :

"If only I might wait a little, I would gladly do it."

The pastor smiled, without letting her see it.

"Don't you think," he said, "the longer you delay the greater is your sin?"

She was twisting her kerchief in both her hands ; she folded it up into a little square, and was now trying, but vainly, to make it into a still smaller one.

"If I tell him about the letters," she murmured, "he'll go off, I'm afraid."

"You dare not trust to God, then?"

"Ah, yes, of course!—but still," she added, "suppose he were to leave me now, all the same?"

"You are more afraid, then, of his going away than of your being left in sin?"

Margit had unrolled her kerchief again, and she raised it to her eyes now, for the tears were beginning to fall. The pastor sat looking at her for a moment, and then :

"Why have you been telling me all this," he went on, "if you didn't mean it to lead to some-

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thing ? " And he paused for a reply, but none came.

" Did you think, perhaps," he went on, " that your sin would be less when once you had confessed it to some one ? "

" That is what I thought," she said softly, her head bowed still lower on her breast. The pastor smiled and rose.

" Yes, yes, my dear Margit," he said, " you must now so act that in your old age you may have happiness."

" If only I might keep what I have now ! " said she. And it seemed to the pastor as if she dared not hope for any greater happiness than always to live in her present constant anxiety. He smiled, and filled his pipe.

" If only," he muttered, " there were some little lassie, now, who could get hold of him, he'd stay here fast enough then, you'd soon see ! "

She looked up quickly, and followed the pastor's movements with her eyes, till he came and paused before her.

" Eli Böen—?—What ?—eh ? " he said.

She blushed fiery red, and looked down again,

but made no answer. The pastor, still halting before her, awaiting her reply, said (as if to himself) :

“If only we could manage so that they could oftener come together to the parsonage here !”

She peered up into his face to see if he were in serious earnest, but she scarcely dared really believe him.

He began to walk up and down again, but presently he paused :

“Look here, now, Margit—to come to the point ; was that the real reason that brought you here to-day ?”

She looked fixedly at the floor, put a couple of fingers in her twisted kerchief, and pulled them out of the tip of it :

“Ah, yes,” she said, “God help me ! that was really just it.”

The pastor burst out laughing, and rubbed his hands.

“Was it that, perhaps, you wanted last time you were here, then ?”

She drew out the end of her kerchief still further, pulling and pulling at it, till she at last got out :

MARGIT'S CONFESSION

"As you say so yourself, it must have been, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! Oh Margit, Margit!—Well, well, we'll see what we can do; for, truth to tell, my wife and daughter have long been of the same mind."

"Is that possible?" cried Margit. And she looked up with so happy, and yet so shame-faced an expression, that it quite rejoiced the pastor to see her open, handsome face, where it was plain to read the child's heart, in spite of all sorrow or fear.

"Yes, Margit," said he. "You who have so much love in you will surely, for Love's own sake, get forgiveness, both of your God and your son, for your transgressions. You have indeed had your punishment already in the constant and great anxiety you have lived in. We shall see now whether God will make speedy ending to it all; for if He wills it so, He will lend us His aid in this."

She sighed deeply again and again; then she rose up, thanked him, curtsied, walked across the room, and curtsied farewell again on the threshold. The moment she was out of the room,

she felt as if transformed. She looked up to the heavens with a quick glance, full of shining thankfulness, and hastened down the steps, and the farther she got the quicker she went, walking back to Kampen that day with a lighter heart than she had had for many and many a year. When she got so far as to be able to see the smoke curling thick and merrily from the chimney, she blessed the house, the farmyard, the whole homestead, the pastor and Arne, and remembered that they were to have smoked meat for dinner, which was her favourite dish.

CHAPTER XIV

BY THE BLACK WATER

KAMPEN was a fine farm. It lay in the midst of the level ground that had the rocky ravine for boundary on the lower side, and the high road on the other. On the upper side of the road stood a thick, close wood ; just behind it began the mountain slope, and in the distance towered up the blue, snow-capped peaks. In a like way, on the other side of the ravine rose another broad range of mountains, that curved away by the Black Water, just at the spot where Bøen lay, and then went higher and higher up towards Kampen, but turned aside on its way towards the broad valley known as the "Lower Parish," that began at this spot ; for Kampen was the last farm in the "Upper Parish."

The front door of the dwelling-house at Kampen opened towards the road ; from the one to the

other, a distance of several hundred yards, led a path with leafy birch-trees on both sides of it. On both sides, too, of the cultivated lands lay woods; the farm lands and meadows could thus be easily increased as much as one pleased; indeed, it was in most respects a splendid spot for farming.

In front of the house lay a little garden. Arne had laid it out and looked after it, as he had learnt to from his books. To the left were the cattle-sheds and the other outhouses; they were for the most part newly-built, and formed a square with the dwelling-house. This latter was painted red, with window-frames and doors of white; it had two storeys and was thatched with turf, so that little bits of green were growing on the roof. On the ridge of this latter was a staff, on which turned an iron cock with a long tail.

Spring had come to the mountains. One Sunday morning the air was somewhat heavy, but calm and not cold; a sort of mist seemed to lie over the forest, but it would lift as the day went on, thought Margit. Arne had read the sermon to his mother and sung hymns, and it had made him feel happy. Now he was standing

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in full trim to go up to the parsonage. He opened the door ; the fragrance of fresh foliage struck upon his senses from the garden, standing deep clothed in morning mist ; from the ravine came the mighty thunderous sound that made the eyes and ears quiver of him that heard it.

Arne began his up-hill walk. As he got further from the waterfall, the sound of the rush of water was less and less terrific ; but it seemed now to spread out over the whole landscape, like the full deep tone of an organ.

"God be with him on the way he's going now !" said the mother, opening the window, and following him with her eyes till the bushes hid him. The mist lifted bit by bit, the sun's rays pierced it through, and life sprang up again in meadow and garden ; all Arne's work was growing there with fresh strength, bringing forth fragrance and joy for his mother. Spring is beautiful indeed for one who has long borne winter.

Arne had no definite object at the parsonage, but he wanted to ask about the newspapers that he took in with the pastor. Lately he had seen the names of several Norwegians who had done well for themselves at gold-mining in America,

and among them was Kristen. Now, Arne had heard a vague rumour that Kristen was expected home. Of this he thought he could get certain information at the parsonage; and if it should be really true that Kristen had already come back to the town, Arne thought he would go and see him in the interval between the end of spring and the hay cutting.

Deep in these thoughts, he strode along till he got to where he could see the Black Water, and, on the other side of it, Bøen. The mist was lifting there, too, by this time, and the sun's rays were sporting over the green sward; the mountain stood with its head all golden, but its breast deep-wrapped in haze; the forest threw its dense shadow over the water on the right, but just in front of the houses the waves had receded somewhat, and the white sand lay glistening in the sun. At a bound, his thoughts were within the red-painted building with the white doors and window-frames which he had painted his own to resemble. He did not think of the first heavy days he had spent there; he thought only of the summer they both saw—he and Eli—up there in the sick-room. Since then,

BY THE BLACK WATER

he had never been there ; after that, he never would—not for all the world. If his thoughts but turned that way, it made him hot and red, and filled him with shame—though, indeed, he thought of it every single day, and many times a day, too ; but if there was one thing which could drive him away from the place, it was (he felt) just that !

On he strode, as if he would take himself far from it all ; but the more he walked, the nearer he came to being right opposite Böen, and, consequently, the more he looked at it. The mist was all gone now ; the heavens were shining clear from one mountain top to the other, the birds swimming in the sun-bright air and crying joyously to one another, the fields answering in myriads of bright blossoms. There was no thunderous waterfall there, to sober radiant joy into awe and reverence ; but freely, boundlessly, full of life, it burst forth—singing, shining, rejoicing, on its upward way.

Arne had walked himself burning hot. He threw himself down on the grass at the foot of a knoll, glanced over at Böen, and turned away, so that his eyes might no longer look that way. Then he heard singing above him, clear-sounding

ARNE

as none he had ever heard before. It darted up from the meadow among the songs of the birds, and almost before he could make sure of the tune, he recognised the words ; for the tune was the one he loved best of all, and the words were those he had had in his heart from his childhood—and lost, the very day he had brought them forth ! He sprang up, as if to catch them now ; but, instead, paused and listened. There came rippling down to him the first verse, then the next, then the third, the fourth—all the verses of his own lost song.

“ Fain would I know what the world may be
Over the mountains high.

Mine eyes can nought but the white snow see,
And up the steep sides the dark fir-tree,
That climbs as if yearning to know,
Ah ! what if one ventured to go ?

“ The eagle flies in his fearless way
Over the mountains high ;
In triumph he swims through the fresh young day,
Spends his wild heart in the hunt for his prey,
And drops where he chooses to rest,
Obedient to no man's behest.

“ Thou yearn'st not to journey, O apple-tree green,
Over the mountains high ;
For in winter thou waitest till summer-time sheen
Shall clothe thee with blossoms so fair to be seen,
What the birds sing, as flying they go,
Thou know'st not—nor carest to know.

BY THE BLACK WATER

- " He who has longed twenty years in his soul
 To be over the mountains high,
Yet who knows that he never will reach that goal,
And feels weaker and feebler as swift the years roll,—
 Let him learn from the birds on the wing
 The tidings of comfort they bring.
- " Carolling birds, say, why left you there,
 Over the mountains high,
Your warm little nests, and a land so fair,
With its leafier trees and its mild, sweet air?
 Say, was it only to bring
 Longing, longing—but never a wing?
- " Say, am I never, never to go
 Over the mountains high?
Ye ice-bound rocks, will ye weigh on me so,
That ye smother my heart 'neath the depths of your snow,
 Penned mid your darksome gloom,
 Till ye yield me up to the tomb?
- " Up, heart, up! and away, away!
 Over the mountains high.
For my courage is young, and my soul will be gay,
If no longer bound straitly and fettered I stay,
 But seeking yon summit to gain,
 No more beat my wings here in vain.
- " One day, I know, shall my journey be
 Over the mountains high.
Lord God! fair is the dwelling of Thee.
Say, is the portal unbarred for me?
 Not yet let its hinges turn;
 Grant me to live—and to yearn."

Arne stood listening till the last verse, the last word died away. Once more he heard the

birds singing merrily and flitting about, but he scarce knew whether he himself dared move. But see who it was he must, at any rate. He moved towards the place, planting his steps so warily that not even the rustle of the grass could be heard. A little butterfly settled upon a flower just in front of his foot, fluttered up, flew on a little, and settled down again ; up again and on, and on, and on in front of him all the way, as he crept to the top of the hill. There, in front of him, stood a thick clump of bushes ; he need go no further, for now he could see. A bird flew up from amidst the undergrowth with a twitter of affright, and sped away over the hill. She looked up at this—she who was sitting there. He bent low down, holding his breath, with his heart beating so that he could hear every pulsation, and listening with every fibre ; he dared not let a leaf rustle—for it was she—it was Eli !

Long, long, after, he looked up a little, and would have liked to draw himself a step nearer ; but the bird had its nest, perhaps, among the undergrowth (thought he), and he would not run the risk of trampling it down, so he peered through

BY THE BLACK WATER

the foliage as the boughs swung apart or drew together. The sunlight was falling straight on her, as she sat there in her black, sleeveless bodice, with her boy's straw hat placed loosely and sideways on her head. In her lap lay a book, but on it a profusion of wild flowers; her right hand was playing among them, as if she was lost in thought; her left arm was resting on her knee and supporting her head. Her eyes were following the bird's flight, and it looked as if she might have been weeping.

A thing more beautiful had Arne never seen or dreamt of in all his lifetime. The sun was scattering all his gold on her and about her; and it seemed to him that the song, though she had long ceased singing, was floating about him, till he felt as if his heart and his breath were beating time to it.

She took the book and opened it, shut it again quickly, and, sitting as before, began to hum. It was his song:

"Green stood the tree, with its leaves tender bright."

He could hear that, though she did not remember either the words or the tune properly, and often

went wrong in them. The last verse was the one she knew best, so she ran over it again and again ; but this was how she sang it :

“ Bright grew the berries, so red, ripe, and rare.

‘ May I take you ? ’ said Lassie, so young, and so fair.

‘ Yes, take them, I pray,

This sunshiny day,’

Said the tree—tralala, tralalalala—fair ! ”

And then up she sprang quickly, shook off all her flowers around her, and carolled out so loudly that her voice seemed to thrill through the air, and well nigh to reach Bøen. And away she darted !—Should he call to her ? No !

Down the hills she sped, singing, trilling ; off fell her hat in her speed, and she stood still among the tall grass to pick it up. “ Shall I call ? ” he thought ; “ she’s looking round ! ”—and down he dropped again. It was long before he dared peer forth ; at first he dared not raise more than his head—he could not see her ; then he knelt, but still he could not see her ; then he rose to his feet—she was gone !

He no longer wanted to go to the parsonage. He no longer wanted anything ! He went and sat where she had been sitting, and he was

BY THE BLACK WATER

sitting there still when the sun above him marked mid-day. On the lake was not a single ripple; from the homesteads smoke was beginning to curl up; the water-fowl ceased calling one after another; the smaller birds were at play, but they were moving towards the shade of the woods; all the dew was gone, and the grass looked soberly demure; there was not a breath of wind to stir the leaves; the sun was now about its mid-day height. He knew not how it was, he found himself, as he sat there, making a little song. A soft tune came into his heart, offering itself to him, and, with his breast strangely filled with all gentle feelings, the tune hovered about him, till it melted them together into one harmonious whole.

He sang it, softly and peacefully as he had composed it :

" In the woods the lad wandered the whole day long,
The whole day long ;
For there he had heard such a wonderful song,
Such a wonderful song.

" He made him a flute from a willow-tree,
From a willow-tree ;
And sought if therein lay the melody,
The melody.

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" It came, and it whispered its name to him,
 Its name to him ;
But, whispering, died in the forest dim,
 In the forest dim.

" And as he lay sleeping, it stole to him oft,
 Stole to him oft.
In dreams it would lovingly hover aloft,
 Hover aloft.

" But when, joyously listening, he woke from his dream,
 Woke from his dream,
Far off hung the song in the wan moon-beam,
 The wan moon-beam.

" ' Oh, Father in Heaven ! now take me from hence,
 Take me from hence !
The song it has stolen my heart and sense,
 My heart and sense.'

" But our Father answered : ' It loves thee well,
 It loves thee well,
Tho' it never thine own for an hour may dwell,
 For an hour may dwell.

" ' For no other song shalt thou long and pine,
 Long and pine ;
But for this one alone, which can never be thine,
 Never be thine ! ' "

CHAPTER XV

ARNE'S TREASURE

It was a Sunday evening in summer-time. The pastor had come back from church, and Margit had been with him at his house till nearly seven o'clock. Then she bade him farewell, and hastened down the steps, and out into the farm-yard, for there she had caught sight of Eli Böen, who had for some time past been playing with the little boy and her own brother.

"Good evening," said Margit, coming to a standstill; "God bless you all!"

"Good evening," said Eli, blushing red, and trying to leave off her game with the children, who kept pressing her to go on; but she begged them to let her go, and got their gracious permission for that one evening.

"It really seems to me," said Margit, "that I must know you."

"That may well be," replied the other.

"Surely you must be Eli Böen?"

Eli acquiesced.

"Ah! so then you really *are* Eli Böen! Yes, I see now you're very like your mother."

Eli's auburn hair had come down, and was hanging long and loose about her; her face was hot, and brown as a berry; her bosom was rising and falling rapidly; she could not get breath to speak, and she laughed at herself for being in such a state.

"Well, well," said Margit, looking at her with pleasure, "it's natural for young folks to be merry. You don't know me, I suppose?"

Eli had been wanting to ask her name, but could not pluck up courage to do it, because the other was so much her elder; now she said in answer, that she did not remember having seen her before.

"Ah no," Margit said, "that was scarcely to be expected, of course; we old people seldom get about much. Perhaps though, you know my son a bit—Arne Kampen? I'm his mother." And she shot a glance at Eli, upon whose face had come a new expression. "I think," she

went on, "he did some work once over there at Bøen?"

Yes, that was so, Eli said.

"What beautiful weather it is this evening! We heaped up the hay to-day, and took it all in before I came out," continued Margit. "This is really God's own weather."

"It must indeed be a glorious year for hay," said Eli.

"You may well say so. Is there a good crop at Bøen?"

"They've taken it all in by now."

"Yes, I suppose so; sturdy folks, quick work. Are you going back to-night?"

No, she was not.

They talked together about one thing and another, and by degrees got intimate enough for Margit to venture to ask if Eli would walk with her part of the way.

"Can't you give me your company just for a few steps?" she said; "it's so seldom I meet any one to talk to, and I dare say it's much the same with you."

Eli had no jacket with her; she could not come, she said.

"Ah, it's too bad of me, I know," said Margit, "to ask such a thing the first time I've ever seen you; but one must put up with something from old folks."

Eli said she would be very glad to go with her; she would just run in and get her jacket.

It was a tight-fitting jacket; when it was fastened about her, it looked as if it was merely a bodice; but now she did up only the two lowest hooks, she was so warm. Her pretty linen vest had a little collar, that turned down and spread out round her neck, and was fastened by a silver clasp in the shape of a bird with outstretched wings. Just such a one had Nils Skrædder worn the first time Margit Kampen danced with him.

"A pretty clasp," said she, looking at it.

"I had it from mother," said Eli.

"Ah, yes, naturally!" said Margit, helping her to fix it.

They walked along side by side. The hay was heaped up, and lay in little stacks; Margit pulled bits out of them, smelt it, and pronounced it good. She ask about the cattle on the parsonage farm, questioned Eli about those at Bøen,

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and told her how big those were that they had at Kampen.

"The place has been getting on mightily these last few years," she said, "and there's room for it to grow as much as one pleases. It supports twelve milch-cows now, and it might keep more ; but my son's got so many books that he reads and goes by, and so he will have them all so well fed."

Eli had nothing to say to all this, as was to be expected. Then Margit asked her how old she was.

She was nineteen.

"Have you taken any part in the house-work ? you look so delicate that you can scarcely have done much," said Margit.

Oh, yes, Eli had borne her share in lots of ways—especially of late.

"Ah, it's good to be used to doing a little or all that sort of thing ; when one has a large house oneself, there is so much wants doing and looking after ; of course, though, when one finds good help at hand in the house, there's not so much need."

Eli thought she must be going back now, for they had got long past the parsonage lands.

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"Oh, it'll be a long time yet," urged Margit, "before the sun goes down. It would be so nice of you if you came a little further, and talked to me." And Eli went with her.

Then Margit began to talk of Arne.

"I don't know if you know him much. He can teach you something about everything. God bless me ! what a lot he has read !"

Eli admitted that she knew he had read a great deal.

"Ah ! yes ; and that's the least to be said for him. Far more than that is how he's behaved to his mother all his life long—far more, I can tell you ! If the old saying's true, that he who's good to his mother 'll be good to his wife, then she he chooses won't need much pity. What is it you're looking for, my child ?"

"Oh, I dropped a little twig I was carrying."

Both were silent for a while, and went on without looking at one another.

"It's so curious in him," the mother began again ; "he was always so kept down and shy as a child, and so he got into the habit of thinking over everything to himself, and people of that sort don't easily pluck up heart."

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Eli felt sure she ought to be going back now, but Margit said it was such a little way up to Kampen that she really must come and see it now, since she had got so far.

Eli declared it was too late for doing so that day.

"Oh, we have always some one or other there who'll see you safely home," said Margit.

"No, no!" cried Eli quickly, making as if to go.

"What a pity," said Margit, "Arne's not at home, so that he can't see you back; but still, there are others there."

And now Eli made less objection. She would very much like to see Kampen, of course (she said), if only it didn't get too late.

"Well, if we stand talking here long it certainly will be," said Margit. And on they went again.

"I suppose you've read lots of books," said the mother "as you've been brought up at the parsonage."

Yes, she had read a good many.

"That will be useful," said Margit, "if you have a husband who's read less."

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Eli had no intention of having such a one, she said.

"Well, well, its best not to, of course ; but here in these parts folks don't get much book-learning."

Eli asked what the smoke came from, away there in the wood.

"That's the new crofter's clearing ; it belongs to Kampen. A man called Upland Knut lives there. He was all alone in the world, so Arne gave him the place to clear and live in. Poor Arne, he knows what it is to be alone !"

Presently they were high enough up to see Kampen. The sun was straight in their faces ; they put up their hands to shield them, and looked down. In the middle of the level ground lay the farm-house, its wall painted red, its window-frames white ; round about it the meadows were mown and the hay was piled up in stacks, the heavy-laden, rich-looking fields of grain contrasting with the pale, shorn hay-fields. Away by the cattle-sheds all was busy life, for cows, sheep, and goats were just come home, amid the tinkling of bells, the baying of dogs, the cry of the milking maids ; and above and

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through all these sounds rose up from the ravine the thunderous voice of the waterfall. The longer Eli looked, the more this last alone took possession of her, filling her with such awe that at length it made her heart beat fast, and roared and thundered through and through her head till she grew quite dazed, and then so happy and excited that she began unconsciously to lag with short steps, so that Margit had to ask her to walk a little faster. She gave a start. "I have never heard a sound like that waterfall before," she explained; "I am almost afraid of it."

"You'll soon grow used to it," said the mother; "you'd get quite to miss it at last."

"Do you really think so?" queried Eli.

"Ah! you'll see, sure enough," said Margit; and she smiled. "Come," she went on; and they turned into the farm from the road; "first we'll look at the cattle. These trees on both sides of the way here Nils planted; he was always wanting to have the place look nice, was Nils; and so's Arne too. Look at the garden he's made there."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Eli, darting up to the garden fence. She had often seen Kampen, but

never so near as now ; so she had not had a glimpse of the garden at all before.

"We'll look at it presently," said Margit.

Eli glanced furtively through the windows, as they passed the house. There was no one within.

They went and stood at the barn door, and looked at the cows as they went lowing by to their stalls. Margit named each by its name to Eli, telling her how much milk each one gave, which of them would calve that summer and which not. The sheep were counted and penned in ; they were of a large, strange breed, for Arne had taken a couple of lambs from the south.

"He takes great pains with all that sort of thing, though you mightn't think it of him," said Margit.

Next they went into the barn and looked at the hay, which was already carted in ; Eli had to smell it, of course, "for such hay," as the mother said, "was not to be found everywhere." She pointed out the different fields through the window-hole of the barn, telling her what crops each one bore, and how much was sown of each kind. And now they went towards the house. Eli,

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who had answered nothing to all Margit said hitherto, asked as they passed the garden if she might not go into it. Being allowed to do so, she next asked leave to pluck just a flower or two. There was a little bench in one corner ; she seated herself on it, apparently only to try it, for she got up again at once.

" We must hurry now, if we don't want to be very late," said Margit, standing in the doorway ; and at this they went in.

Margit asked Eli if she might not give her something to eat and drink, as this was the first time she had crossed their threshold ; but Eli turned red, and curtly declined. She turned and looked round her. She was in the room they used in the daytime ; it was not large, but it was cosy-looking, with its timepiece, its tiled stove, and its windows that faced the road. Nil's fiddle, old and time-stained, but with new strings, hung there, as did a couple of guns that belonged to Arne, his English fishing-rod, and other precious objects, which the mother took down and showed her. Eli looked at them, and touched them. The room was not painted, for Arne disliked painted walls ; neither was the

other room, which looked out upon the ravine, with the bright, clear mountain-peak far away behind. This apartment, which was an addition to the original building—as was quite half that side of the house—was larger and handsomer than the other; but in the two smaller rooms of the wing the walls and ceilings were painted, for that was where the mother was to live when she got old, and he took to himself a wife. They went into the kitchen, the pantry, the wash-house. Not a single word did Eli say, and she looked at everything as if from a distance. Even when Margit handed her something to look at, she put out her hand indeed, but scarcely touched it. Margit, talking to her the whole way, took her back to the house again; they must go up and look at the higher storey.

Up there were tidy rooms that corresponded to those down below, but they looked new, and not lived in, except one that faced the ravine. In these rooms there lay about, or hung on the walls, all sorts of household goods that were not required for daily use. There were a whole row of fur coverlets and bed-clothes; these the mother took hold of and lifted one

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after another, and bade Eli do so too. The girl seemed now to have plucked up heart a little more, or else she took more interest in things like these; for some of them she went back to more than once, asking questions, and growing brighter and brighter. Presently the mother said, "Now we'll go, last of all, to Arne's own room," and they went into the one facing the waterfall. The thunderous voice of the torrent smote right upon them through the open window. Up at the height they were, they could see jets and spray from the cascade amid the crags, but not the water of the fall itself, save at one place further up, where a huge bit of rock had broken loose, at the very spot where the torrent came rushing along, gathering all its strength for the last leap into the depths below. Fresh green turf had covered the upper surface of the rocky wall, and down into it a handful of fir-cones had dived, throwing their heads heavenward again, with their roots deep in the rifts of stone. The wind had dashed upon the trees, shaking them with all its might; the spray of the torrent had washed against their stems, so that not a twig

was to be seen within four ells of their roots ! they stood there as if with knees crippled and bent, and gnarled and knotted were the branches of them ; but yet, stand firmly there they did, thrusting their heads aloft 'mid the mountain walls. They were the first that Eli saw from the window, and next she saw the shining white snow-peaks that rose above the green. She turned aside her eyes ; over the fields lay peace and fruitfulness. And now at last she looked round the room where she stood, for the torrent had forbidden her doing so at first.

How calm and tranquil it was in here, contrasted with the tumult without ! She singled out no special thing to gaze at, for everything in the room seemed to be in harmony, and nearly all of it was a new thing to her ; for Arne had put his heart's love into that room, so that, poor as it was, it had been made as beautiful in almost every least particular as well might be. It seemed to her that his verses came singing in as she stood there, or that he himself smiled at her from everything. The first thing her mind took in separately was a large, handsome, and finely-carven bookcase. There were so many

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books in it that she thought the pastor himself could scarcely have more. Next, a handsome chest caught her attention. He had many a precious thing in that, his mother told her; there, too, he kept his money, she added, in a whisper. Twice had they had a legacy, she told her, a little later; once more they were to do so, if all went as it should. "But money," she said, "is not the best thing in the world; he's got the power to get what's better."

There were many little knick-knacks about the room that were well worth looking at, and Eli looked at them all, as happy and bright as a child.

Margit patted her on the shoulder. "I've never seen you before to-day, child," she said, "and yet I feel so fond of you," and she looked lovingly into her eyes. Before Eli had time to blush, she nudged her gently, and went on:

"Look at that little red chest there; there's something precious in that, you may be sure."

Eli looked at it. It was a little square box that she would much have liked to have for her own.

"He doesn't want me to know," whispered the mother, "what there is in that box, and he hides

away the key every time." So saying, she went to some clothes that were hanging on the wall, took down a velvet waistcoat, felt in the watch-pocket and drew out the key.

"Come now," she whispered, "come and see!"

Eli thought what the mother was now doing was not at all right; but women are women, and both these two walked softly up to the little chest and knelt down before it. But the moment the mother raised the lid, such a pleasant odour arose that Eli clapped her hands together in delight before she saw a single thing. At the top lay a kerchief, spread out over everything, and this Margit now drew aside. "Look, look now!" she whispered, and drew forth a fine black silk kerchief, but not one of the kind worn by men.

"That's just fit for a girl," said the mother, "and here's another."

Eli took hold of it involuntarily, and the other declared she must try it on her, though the girl objected and turned away her head. The mother folded it up carefully again.

"Look at this!" she cried, drawing forth a handful of beautiful silk ribbons, "all just as if for a girl, isn't it?"

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Eli was fiery red now, but she uttered not a sound ; her bosom was heaving, her eyes down-cast, her whole being showed anxious unrest.

"There's more yet !" went on Margit, drawing out some handsome black velvet, evidently meant for a dress. "This is fine indeed"—and she held it up to the light.

Eli's hands were trembling a little when the mother bade her feel it ; she felt the blood rushing to her head, and she seemed to want to turn away but not to have the power to do so.

"He's bought something each time he's been to the town," said Margit.

Eli could scarcely hold out much more now, she felt ; her glance flitted from one thing in the chest to another, and then back again to the velvet ; but indeed she no longer saw anything. But the mother went on with what she was doing. The last thing she took up was wrapped in many papers ; she unfolded them one after another, so arousing Eli's curiosity that she got more and more excited ; at last appeared a pair of little shoes. Neither Eli nor Margit had ever seen their like ; the mother, indeed, declared she would not have believed such things could be

made. Not a word said the girl, but when the shoes were given her to hold she closed her five little fingers tight on them, and then felt so ashamed of herself that she was like to weep: she would have given anything to go away, but she dared not trust herself to speak, she dared not cause the mother to look up. Margit, indeed, was fully taken up with what she herself was doing.

"Doesn't it look," she said, "just as if he had bought all these things, one after another, for some one he did not dare give them to?" and she went on putting them all carefully back in the places she had taken them from; she must have had practice in it. "Now let's see what's in the compartment here," she went on, and opened it with much care, as there really was some great thing coming now. There lay a buckle, broad as if for a belt. This was the first thing she called Eli's attention to, and next to a pair of gold rings fastened together; and then Eli saw a velvet-bound hymn-book with silver clasps, and after that nothing more—for she had seen engraved on the silver clasp of the hymn-book, in finely-wrought characters:

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"ELI BAARDSDATTER BÖEN."

The mother urged her to look; she got no answer, but she saw tear after tear roll down on the silk covering, and stream over it. Margit put down the brooch she was holding up, closed the box again, turned, and clasped Eli to her heart. And the daughter wept there, and the mother wept over her, and neither of them said a word.

* * * * *

A little while after, Eli was walking in the garden alone; the mother had gone to the kitchen to prepare something especially nice, for Arne would soon be back now. Presently she went out into the garden for Eli; she saw her sitting, leaning towards the ground, writing on the sandy soil. She rubbed it out with her foot when she saw Margit coming, and looked up at her smiling, but she had evidently been weeping.

"You've nothing to cry for, my child," said Margit, and patted her cheeks.

They saw something black among the bushes by the road. Into the house darted Eli, and

after her Margit. There was quite a little banquet spread within, with its cream pudding, smoked meat, and cakes ; but not a glance did it get from Eli : she went and sat on a chair against the wall in the corner by the clock, and started if she but heard a cat stirring. The mother sat down by the table. They heard a man's step on the stone flags, then a light, quick step in the passage ; the door opened, and Arne came in. The first thing he saw was Eli in the corner by the clock ; he let go the door-handle and stood motionless. Thereon Eli's confusion was even greater than before ; she got up, repented having done so, and turned her face to the wall.

" *You* here !" said Arne, softly, blushing fiery red as he spoke.

She raised one hand and held it before her, as one does when the sun shines too dazzlingly in one's eyes.

" Why——?" he broke off, but he made a step or two towards her ; she lowered her hand again, turned to him with bowed head, and burst into tears.

" God bless you, Eli !" said he, and he put his

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arms round her ; she leant her head on his breast. He whispered something in her ear ; she made no answer, but clasped him round the neck with her two arms.

Long stood they thus, with not a sound to be heard save the torrent's eternal admonition. Suddenly somebody seemed to be crying on the other side of the table ; Arne looked up ; it was his mother, whom he had not seen in the room till then.

"Now, I'm *sure* you won't go away from me, Arne," said she, coming over to where he stood. Her tears were flowing fast, but that did her good, she said.

* * * * *

As they walked home together in the fair summer evening, they could not utter many words to one another in their strange new happiness. Nature herself interpreted their hearts to one another, in her tranquil, shining, magnificent companionship. But on his way home from their first summer-night's walk, Arne, as he walked towards the rising sun, composed a song, which, though he had not

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time then to complete it, he perfected soon after, and made it his daily hymn for a season.

"Once I thought that I really might grow to be great,
If afar in the world I might grapple with fate ;
And I recked not of friend, and I recked not of foe,
While my heart was aflame with a yearning to go.
But sudden mine eye met a girl's soft glance,
And straight died my longing for flight ;
And it seems to me now that the fairest on earth
Were to live in that dear maid's sight.

"Once I thought that I really might grow to be great,
If afar in the world I might grapple with fate ;
For the voice of Ambition cried loudly ' Arise,
Young spirit ! and struggle thy best for the prize,'
But that maiden she taught me (with never a word)
That the dearest of things God can give
Is not to be famous, renowned, or great,
But perfect in manhood to live.

"Once I thought that I really might grow to be great,
If afar in the world I might grapple with fate ;
But to do aught at home I should never be bold,
For all I met here were misjudging and cold.
But when I saw her, and her sweet, bright love,
And her radiant, pure-hearted glee,
And I knew that her joy and her heart—all—was
mine,
Ah ! to live was a glory to me."

After that there was many a summer's evening walk, followed by many a song. Here is one such :

ARNE'S TREASURE

" Whence comes this sudden change I find ?
No flood has been, no angry wind ;
And yet my gently wand'ring course
Now rushes with a torrent's force
Mightily to the mighty sea.

" Can something in Life's self, indeed,
Give to a man at utmost need
An earnest strength, yet tender heart,
That peril, care, and Love's own smart
Encompass, as with bridal chains ?

" Sends Life to me such promise rare
As now I feel—strong, helpful, fair ?
Then must some God this thing have willed
Ordaining, ' Be My word fulfilled,'
Wafting me soft to joy for aye."

But perhaps nothing expressed his deep
sense of thankfulness so well as the following :

" The might that I got from my power to sing
Made Life's joy and Life's pain
Fall like sunshine and rain
On my soul, in its first fresh years of spring.
So in sorrow or glee
No harm I knew,
While my song might be
Of my own Love true.

" The might that I got from my power to sing
Made me love young and old,
Made me urgent and bold,
Spite of self, to prize love beyond all other thing.

ARNE

On, on did I roam
Every barrier through,
Till at last I reached home
And my own Love true.

“ The might that I got from my power to sing
Must help me to cheer
Those who wander in fear,
And shall lead them to share the glad tidings I bring.
Joy perfecter never
To man can be due,
Than carolling ever
His own Love true.”

CHAPTER XVI

"AFTER MANY DAYS"

It was autumn-time, and the harvest was beginning to be garnered. The day was bright and clear, and the air mild as in summer-time, for it had been raining the night before and in the morning. Though it was Saturday, many boats were making their way over the Black Water to the church—the men in shirt-sleeves rowing, the women sitting in the bows and stern with bright-coloured kerchiefs thrown over their heads. Many more boats, however, seemed to be on their way to Böen, to row out again from it in a long and large procession; for to-day Baard Böen was to celebrate the marriage of his daughter Eli with Arne Nilsson Kampen.

All doors stood open; people were constantly in and out; children, with bits of cake in their hands, fearing for their new clothes, and looking

shyly at one another, all about the farmyard. An old woman sat on the granary steps by herself ; it was Margit Kampen. She was wearing a large silver ring that had several smaller ones fastened to its upper edge ; every now and then she looked at it. Nils had given it her the day she became his wife, and she had never worn it since.

Within, in the two or three sitting rooms, the steward and two young bridesmen—Eli's brother and the pastor's son—were busily going about handing refreshments to the guests that came streaming in to the great wedding. Up in Eli's room sat the bride, the pastor's wife, and Mathilde, who had come from the town on purpose to dress the bride ; for that the two girls had promised to do, the one for the other, ever since they were children. Arne, in his smartest of clothes, his round, well-fitting coat, and a neckcloth that Eli herself had worked for him, was downstairs in the room with the window that Eli had once written "Arne" on. It was open, and by it he stood, leaning against the frame and looking out over the still water at the parsonage and the church.

“ AFTER MANY DAYS ”

Out in the passage just then two persons met one another, both of whom had just come from looking after things. One of them was fresh from the landing-stage, where he had been arranging the boats for the church. He was wearing a round black cloth jacket and blue frieze breeches, the dye from which had made his hands all blue ; his white neckcloth set off his fair face and long, yellow hair ; his high forehead looked serene, and on his lips played a smile. This was Baard. The person he met in the passage had just come from the kitchen. She was dressed for the church ; her figure looked slender and stately, and she walked self-consciously and slowly through the doorway. When she met Baard, she paused, and her lips drew down a little on one side : it was Birgit, his wife. Each had something to say to the other, but the only sign of it was that both came to a standstill. Baard was more confused than she, but he smiled more and more, and his evident and great confusion came to his aid, for, without more ado, he began to go up the stairs, with a “ perhaps you’ll come too.”

She followed him. In the garret up there

they were alone by themselves ; but yet Baard locked the door behind her, and allowed himself plenty of time. When at last he turned away from it, Birgit was by the window, looking out, so as not to see what was going on in the room.

Baard drew forth a little flask from his breast-pocket, and a little silver cup. He offered it to his wife, but she refused it, in spite of his assurance that it was wine sent them from the parsonage. He then drank some himself, though, as he drank, he kept on pressing her to share it. At length he corked the flask again, put it away with the little silver cup in his breast-pocket, and seated himself on a box. It evidently annoyed him that his wife would not drink with him.

He drew a long, deep breath again and again. Birgit was leaning against the window-frame just in front of him, one hand resting on it. Baard had something to say, but to say it now was harder than ever.

"Birgit," he began, "you've been thinking to-day as I've been, I dare say. He heard her shift from one side of the window to the other, and then rest on her arm again. "You guess what I mean," he went on. "He stood between

“ AFTER MANY DAYS ”

us two, I know. I thought that would only go on till our marriage, but it's gone on much longer.”

He heard her breathing quick ; he saw her fidget about again, but he could not see her face. He himself was undergoing such a struggle that he had to dry his face with his coat-sleeve. After long wrestling he began again :

“ To-day a son of his, handsome and clever, has come into our house, and to him we have given our only daughter. . . . How would it be, Birgit, if we too were to join our hearts to-day ? ”

His voice trembled away, and he cleared his throat. Birgit, who had been fidgeting uneasily, laid her head on her arm again, but said nothing. Long Baard waited ; he heard her breathing ; but he got no answer. He had no more to say. He looked up, his face growing paler and paler ; but she did not even turn her head. At last he rose. At that same moment came a gentle rap on the door, and a soft voice asked :

“ Aren't you coming, mother ? ”

It was Eli ; and there was something in the

voice that made Baard involuntarily stand still, and involuntarily look at Birgit. Birgit, too, raised her head. She looked towards the door, and her eyes met Baard's white face.

"Aren't you coming, mother?" cried the voice from without, once more.

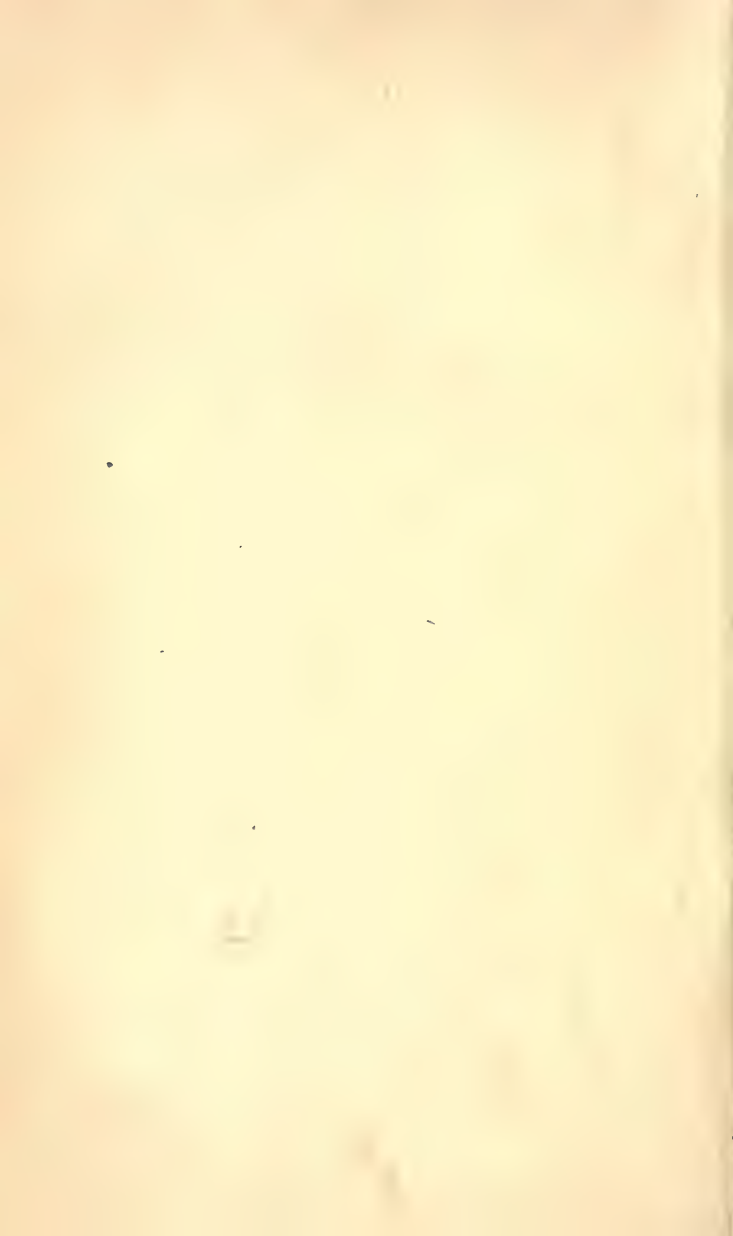
"Yes, I'm coming now, dear!" said Birgit, in a choking voice; and with firm step she walked across the room to Baard, took his hand in hers, and broke into violent sobs. The two hands clung tight together; time-worn hands they were now; but firmly they clasped each other, as if each had been seeking the other for twenty years. Hand in hand were they still, as they went to open the door; and presently, too, when the bridal train streamed down to the landing-stage, and Arne gave his hand to Eli, leading the way; Baard, seeing it, took his wife's hand in his own, against all use and custom, and followed them—smiling happily. But behind them came Margit Kampen—alone, as was her wont.

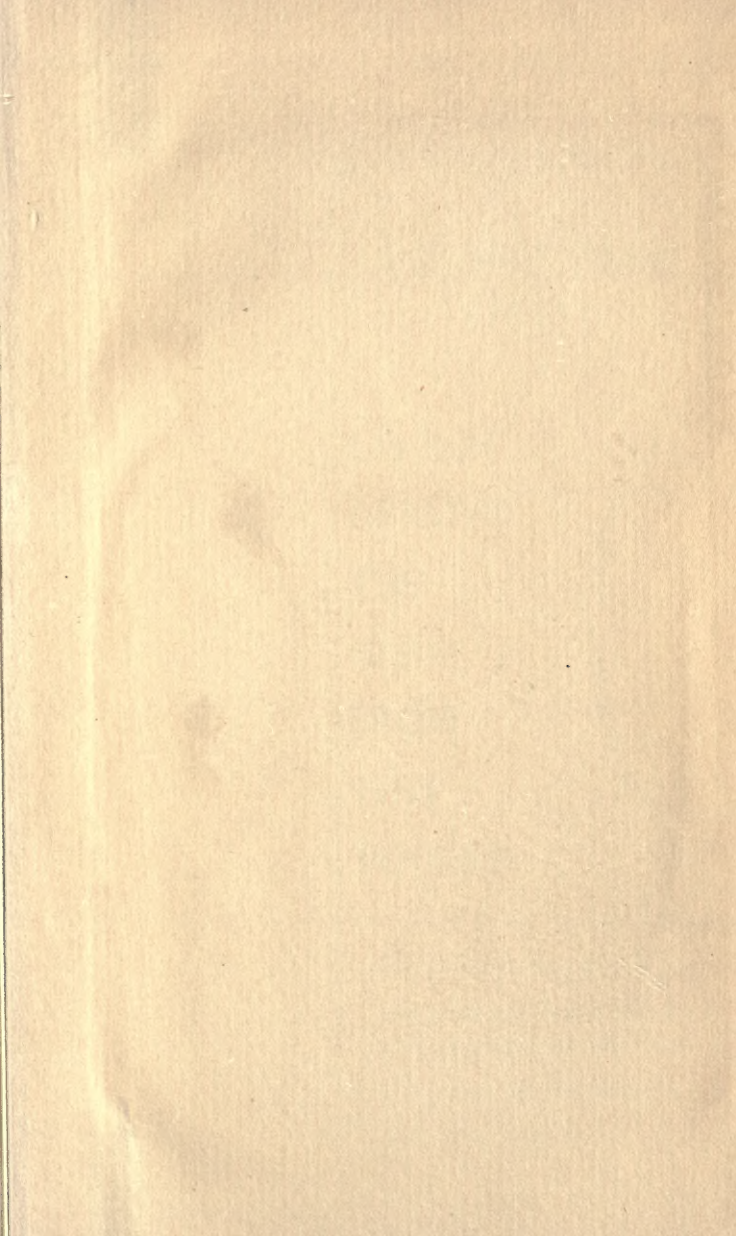
Baard was beside himself with joy on that day; as he sat chatting with the rowers, one of them, looking at the mountain behind them,

“ AFTER MANY DAYS ”

remarked how wonderful it was that even rocky crags like those could be clad in foliage.

“ It must go on, whether it will or no,” said Baard. And his eyes wandered over the wedding party till they rested on the bridal pair and his wife. “ Ah ! ” he added, “ no one would have thought such a thing possible—twenty years ago.”







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